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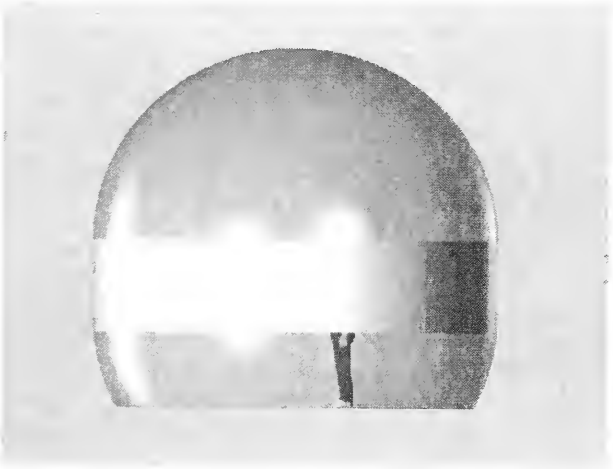

Vassiliea Stylianidou, *do you want to kill me, baby?* 2002. Videostill.

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Volume 18, 2002 - 2003

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A Journal of Germanic Studies

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Nothing Behind It: The Search for the Events Behind the Surface of the Media

Helmut Lethen

On the morning of March 10, 2003, I was struck by the front page of the *New York Times*. I found illustrated here the topic of my talk for the following day in the UCLA Department of Germanic Languages.[1] The eye-catcher of the front page was a photograph representing the traces of an unusually cold winter that had left three Great Lakes—Superior, Huron, and Erie—90 percent frozen, threatening the start of the shipping season (Figure 1).

More information on page 15: Following the data supplied by the National Ice Center, a unit of the National Oceanographic and Atmosphere Administration, a complete freeze-over would be the first

Figure 1: Front Page, *The New York Times*, 10 Mar. 2003.

since 1979. However, as David Helberg, executive director of the Duluth Seaway Port Authority says: "It has its own unique beauty." So what's behind the photograph: the statistical data from the National Oceanographic and Atmosphere Administration, or just an executive director's aesthetic sense? The main caption, *Icebreaker Wanted*, constitutes a relation between the photograph and the surrounding articles on the front page. This strong contextualization charges this harmless picture with extreme energy.

The sense of the picture's beauty has a long iconographic tradition. Although aesthetics in the 18th century would not have been attracted by this meaningless desert, romantic painters discovered new meaning in frozen landscapes under a sky which was no longer inhabited by God. The caption of Caspar David Friedrich's famous painting was not: *Die gescheiterte Hoffnung* ("The Wrecked Hope") but *Das Eismeer*. Throughout the 19th century, images of ice and the Ice Age shifted in meaning between catastrophe and redemption, a redemption of each organism from its fate of decay.

On Monday, March 10, nothing of this iconographic tradition may have been known. Surrounded by various articles (the breakup of the Space Shuttle Columbia, the U.S. request for over 60 nations to expel Iraqi envoys, and the establishment of a deadline), the caption *Icebreaker Wanted* attains a dynamic of meaning: to break up, to expel, to split the world, and to set a deadline—these were the motifs that constructed the image of ice in the 19th century.

So what's behind the photograph? To what extent is it the frozen Lake Superior? Or are the traces of Lake Superior's ice entirely wiped out to make room for a mesh of meaning? Did this photograph become a discursive construction only when it was circulated by the media? Can you imagine that, beforehand, it was just a fingerprint of the ice?

Whoever expects the media to give us fingerprints of events will be accused of being naive (Lethen 205-231). Any phenomenon we examine is the result of a cultural coding process. This is commonplace in cultural studies. Something presented as "authentic" is a construction, which we have forgotten is a construction (Strub 7-18). In the past few decades this has been and still is a productive approach which has destroyed the myth of documentation as a window to reality.

In this situation, whoever poses the question of what is "behind" the construction is in danger of being labeled an "ontological thinker." Yet I am still convinced that cultural studies needs to ask this question for three reasons:

- Only by suspecting that the "reality," which lies behind construction, gives off background noise does the viewer attempt to discover the

nature of this construction.

- The dynamics of cultural economy are maintained by the search for the events behind the media.
- The search keeps our science in a state of "ontological unrest" (Groys 55).

To put it more poetically: in the media (and in cultural studies) there is the "desire for a reality that cannot be touched," as Roland Barthes has expressed it (87).

I. A risky passage

In 1977, art fans in Bologna were invited to a performance by Marina Abramovic in the Galleria Communale d'Arte Moderna. A native of Montenegro, Marina Abramovic was already a person of fame in performance circles. In past performances, she had put her body to the most physical extremes. This time a different scenario was waiting for the audience. There was no way to enter the main hall, where the performance was thought to be. Instead, the width of the museum's front door museum had been narrowed. Marina Abramovic and her partner Ulay were standing in the entry of the gallery—stark naked. The guests invited to the opening had the task of managing a most delicate situation (Wagner 276; Schneede 52).

Figure II: *Imponderabilia*. 1977. Marina Abramovic and Ulay. Performance Galleria Communale d'Arte Moderna Bologna.

It is easy to imagine the scene: in front of the door, people were backed up. The hesitant visitors most likely stayed back and formed a semi-circle around the entrance. Courage was needed to proceed as each person now had to leave the secure semi-circle of observers and step forward. In order to pass by the two naked people, you automatically became the focus of other people's stares and were expected to act properly. The risk you take lies in having to enter alone and isolated into

a field of observation. There are no set social rules on how to act in such a situation (Figure II).

The fear is understandable as you risk becoming the object of discriminating stares if your behavior is not appropriate. This sets the stage for what is typical of the social situation of shame. Shame isolates a person. The person has to mingle the distancing sense of sight with the non-distancing sense of touch. He cannot allow the sense of touch to take over unless he wishes to run the risk of becoming an object of shame or ridicule.

Should one keep skin contact with the two actors to a minimum, or maximize it? Would it be better to turn one's back to the diva (known as the "illustrious daughter of Montenegro") and face Ulay, who was so tall that one would not have to look him in the eye anyway?

On the other hand, would it be more appropriate to look at Abramovic's neck, keeping one's back to Ulay?

This lack of knowing how to act is based on the fact that there are no set rules to the game here, in this place, as the action is taking place in front of the museum, not inside. The criteria for sanctions against inappropriate behavior in public still apply here. What rules apply on the threshold?

The expressions of the actors on the doorstep indicate that this is meant to be serious. The expression of the viewer shows that he accepts this seriousness, but the ironic smile is meant to show us that the atmosphere created by the naked bodies doesn't bother him (Figure III).

Why should he even go through the motions of this embarrassing test—this passage which demands balance, diplomacy, subduing, or demonstration of a sovereign possession of insider know-how, if he cannot expect to be rewarded once he is inside?

What followed is not surprising to us today. Once inside, the person met up with a group of viewers who had successfully completed the passage and

Figure III: *Imponderabilia*. 1977. Marina Abramovic and Ulay. Performance
Galleria Communale d'Arte Moderna Bologna.

had now turned their attention to two video screens. The first showed a somewhat time-delayed view of the entry into the doorway, and the second a view of the appearance after having passed through. The video representation fell under the rules of the museum now. It relieved all the participants of the burden of shame. The sense of distance was present, and the protection of the cooler medium allowed the imagination of touch to dissipate, something that had been impossible in the field of social action. The circle was closed. The media were flickering in the interior room. In retrospect, they made it clear that you had missed the essential sensation and could miss it now. Behind the passageway there were pictures of the passageway. Touch, even if desired, could be realized only in the imagination.

At this point, you can certainly argue that the insiders of 1977 were able to deal with the situation much differently. What I have portrayed here as a situation of shame was more of a moderate occurrence in the framework of the *Arte povera* of the 1970s, which used bundles of brushwood and piles of ashes as well as the "poor material" of the human body. Seen from this point of view, the performance in Bologna strikes us as more of a harmless thing. Its actions were aimed against the official visual media. Against the de-realization it could have set the body in the sense of pain with the help of knives, razor blades, or whips.

Figure IV: Marina Abramovic. *Lips of Thomas.*
1975.
Video: 2 hours.
Krinzinger Gallery, Innsbruck.

Figure V: Photograph of Marina Abramovic's

The couple Abramovic and Ulay was known for their excessive performances (Danzker). Their 1976 *Relation in Space* showed their naked bodies being thrown against each other for an hour with ever increasing speed. A year later they sat on the floor for forty minutes in the performance of *Breathing In—Breathing Out*, holding their noses in order to move the same carbon dioxide from one pair of lungs to the other.

With this as background knowledge, we can imagine the disappointment of fans of the authentic and people of the in-scene. They found themselves facing a passageway that did not lead them to pain as a guarantee of the "authentic," but only led them to the brightness of the media world. This was, of course, a more sophisticated event.

By examining photographs from the performance of Marina Abramovic, I would like to draw attention to how cultural studies are currently treating the search for the event UNDER the media surface: We begin with the rituals of pain, which could be observed in some of the world's art circles of the 1970s. It was in these years that, through the inflation of pictures, the suffering from "de-realization" of the world began. Instead of the technical constructions of film and photography which only simulate the world, the experience of intensity was meant to come. With extreme physiological conditions, the surface of the medium was destroyed as if hit by lightning, and the view of the experience in the depth of the body was revealed.

Figure VI: Marina Abramovic's father as partisan general with fellow soldier

The pain was meant to make it possible to distinguish between "real and not real." The pain seemed to make it possible to make the "jump out of the library" of pictures and text into the desert of reality (Figure IV).

We see photos of Marina Abramovic, marked by whip lashes, and hear the warnings of cultural scientists: It is wrong to believe that the surface of the media world can be broken by the performance of pain. Pain, we learn, has a limited rhetorical repertoire, as it is limited to the moment in which it is inflicted on someone (Christians 20, 65). As a rule the exclamations of pain are included in the chain of iconographic pictures. "To feel the pulse of Christian iconography in certain wartime or disaster-time photographs is not a sentimental projection," Susan Sontag recently said (94). We cling to the illusion that by expressing the pain, we can make the leap out of the archive in which all of our expressions of feeling are set. Cultural studies counters this expectation with the bitter knowledge that behind the surface of the media there is no real occurrence but only the shelves of various archives (Christians 94).

Thus it is with this photo of Marina Abramovic; like any other photograph it is nothing more than a techno-cultural construction because there is no such thing as black and white reality in the shape of a rectangle. The photo is not a window to the realness of the tortured body. Behind

the photograph there is nothing. It is a two-dimensional form that only becomes a picture through our animation (Belting 213-239).

This animation is guided by a library of old pictures, such as pictures of Christian martyrs. From January 28 to April 27, 2003, there was an exhibition at the J. Paul Getty Museum by the video artist Bill Viola, in which the gap between authentic representation of passion and its iconographic determination was being discussed.[2]

Figure VII: Marina Abramovic's father as commander of the First Proletarian Brigade in Yugoslavia

Of course this insight into the cultural predisposition of "spontaneous" expression of feeling is an injury to the sensibilities of the subject emerging as an autonomous being (Meyer). That is why it meets such resistance. The most persuasive arguments stem, strangely enough, from one of the pioneers of semiotics: Roland Barthes, who insisted that a photograph contains traces of realness. There was, after all, a real object in front of the lens of the photographer; the degree of light has burned itself into the chemical complexity of the film. The object, which has left its image on the film, may be forever absent now; it is trapped in the rectangle of the print and is subject to all types of technical manipulations, but it did once exist behind the surface of the photograph (Barthes 87).

Can we follow the idea of pain with an analogy of this argument? The analogy would be of this kind: that the sense of pain was a real happening which – like light hitting the chemical layer of a film – suddenly hits the surface of speech or image. As you see, this does not work because pain is not a material substance like light and language is not a medium of the chemical type. We still will take the objection quite seriously that in the case of the photograph there are traces of reality on the surface of the medium, but in the second part of my essay, I will try to mine what is hidden behind the documentary photograph.

I would like to conclude this first part with a supplement to Marina Abramovic's performance. There are two more familiar considerations I have not yet mentioned:

First, isn't the psychodrama of father-mother-child always present in the space beneath the surface? The speculation is interesting. In the case of the Abramovic family, it takes on spectacular dimensions: Marina's mother was a major in Tito's partisan army; after the war, she headed the revolutionary museum in Belgrade. Marina's father, a partisan general, was later the commander of the First Proletarian Brigade in Yugoslavia (Goldberg), (Figures V-VII).

A short biographic sketch states that, "Father loved danger, mother loved order," and this seems to have had consequences for her childhood home. The father was always gone. And the child? The child spent her childhood within the rituals of her Serbian-orthodox grandmother. In 1968, her father tears up his party ID book in a wave of sympathy for the student protests, and his daughter follows suit. It is only too inviting to construct a forum for psychoanalytical stories here. In the 1990s, Marina Abramovic begins to paste together and work with these stories in a series of autobiographical pictures.

Secondly, we also have to mention that one of the oldest assumptions of our science is this: behind the media there are ideas. In addition, I have refrained until this point from explaining what the intentions of the artists Abramovic and Ulay were.

Let us return to the performance in Bologna. At that time, Abramovic and Ulay were pursuing a path that our reconstruction has not yet considered: in creating the passageway in Bologna, they were seeking to build an energy field between their bodies. The observers who had to pass through this energy field were to decide towards whom they would turn. The task of the audience was to close the circle of the energy. Behind this concept there were lessons of Greek, Chinese, Sumerian, and Indian origin.

From the first suspicion that there is a space "behind" the media, it is only a small step to an entire series of rooms: from the technical framework of photography to the Chinese teachings of energy, from the art world of Bologna to a partisan general. The meaning of the word "space" with a certain "depth" must however be abandoned here as it only leads to other stories in neighboring archives.

Yet, even these two new considerations have turned out to be no more than a simple repetition of the following thesis: Behind the surface of the media there are already stories lodged in the archive.

Another conclusion is still possible: The realness of the photograph is a function of the social relationship between the viewer

Figure VIII: Page A11, *The New York Times*, 6 Jun. 1994.

and the image of the "outside reality." Outside reality becomes reality only to the extent in which there is a social relationship with the viewer. The stories behind the pictures are part of this relationship's fabric. Perhaps the following samples of documentary photographs will shed some more light on this.

II. An accident in the photo lab

We treat photographs like findings that the camera has torn from the world. In our everyday lives, they function as fact-making machines that can help us orient ourselves and store memories.

On June 6, 1994, *The New York Times* published a photograph which had been taken 50 years earlier by Robert Capa. It was taken at 6:30 a.m. on D-Day as the Allies began their invasion on the coast of Normandy. Along with this photograph, the editors at the *New York Times* printed a commentary written by Alan Trachtenberg, Professor of American Studies and English at Yale University. He posed the question of how a photo of such miserable technical quality could have come to

affect us in such a way that it has since become a historical icon (Figure VIII).

When this photograph was published in *Life* magazine on June 19, 1944, it had a certain polemic quality. In contrast to the initial official reports on the ease of the landing maneuvers, Capa's photograph shows the physical experience of the chaos of the undertaking. Capa had landed with the first wave of soldiers on the beach and recalls the event in his memoirs *Slightly out of Focus*. He remembers the light of early dawn being so gray that he could hardly discern the shapes of the soldiers from the water being hit by bombs.

The only objects that were optically clear were the grotesque steel shapes of the barriers that Hitler's anti-invasion brain trust had set up in the water in a strange and surrealistic design. Capa himself was preoccupied with assessing the quality of light.

Of the 72 shots, only 11 survived the hectic pace of the darkroom in London, and even these were marked with heat spots and traces of emulsion fluid. An assistant in the lab had overheated the negatives during the drying process. The photograph published in the Times, number 4 in the series, was an especially ill-treated sample of the darkroom disaster. This turned out to be an advantage.

The technical flaws, the obvious defects of the chemical layer, only served to intensify the impression of something not conveyable. The London editorial staff of *Life* magazine provided a caption explaining the unfocused image of the photography with the "intense excitement of the moment" to which the photographer had succumbed.

The office of the magazine did not tell the photographer about the mistakes made in the darkroom. They told him that salt water had somehow gotten into the camera and partially destroyed the film.

In a commentary in the *New York Times* of 1994, these flaws bring on a new kind of quality: The picture does not only offer us a fingerprint of the dangerous situation that the soldiers in the water were in and the daringness of the wartime photographer; it also represents the panic in the lab's darkroom.

Fifty years after the event, the accidents of the darkroom and the technical conditions of the shooting were no longer a secret; they were now the focus of attention which served to "authenticate" the photograph as a media event.

On the 50th anniversary of the event, *The New York Times* does not only deliver its readers a historical symbol of the times whose authenticity is unchallenged. The paper seems to see a need to convince its readership of the authenticity of the photograph by giving the background of the media conditions from the camera to the darkroom.

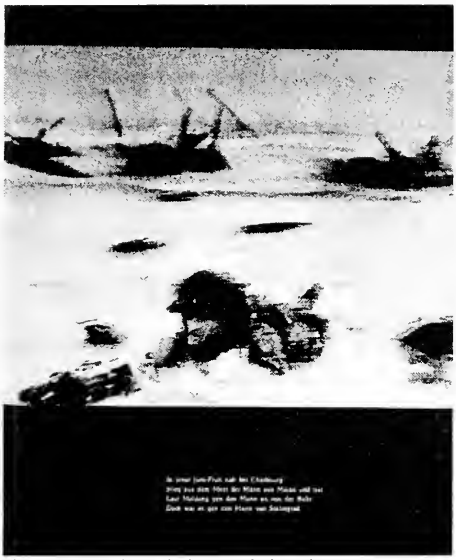


Figure IX: *Kriegsfibel.* Bertolt Brecht. Photograph—*D-Day, Omaha beach.* Robert Capa. 6 Jun. 1944.

Indeed, as the French semiotician Roland Barthes noted, the strange fact of the fuzziness of the photo is supposed to increase its authenticity. Society wants meaning, yet at the same time this meaning should be surrounded by a fuzziness which should also take some of the focus away (117).The photograph in *Life* magazine had the function to break through the idea that propaganda had created, that of an easy landing on the beach, and to show the chaos. The story of its fabrication, the disaster in the darkroom, hides the fact that the quality of this photograph is not only due to the technical settings of the camera or to the norms of aesthetic values, but is a result of contingency. It was an accident, an unplanned element that broke through the framework and set pattern of its technical and cultural coding. This notion of contingency seems enough for us to speak of the authenticity of this photograph.

In the year it was published, Capa's photograph was assigned an entirely different story. The emigrant Bertolt Brecht discovered Capa's photograph in *Life* magazine, added a four-line verse, and included it in his *Kriegsfibel* ("War Primer"), (Figure IX).

> *In jener Juni-Früh nah bei Cherbourg*
> *Stieg aus dem Meer der Mann aus Maine und trat*
> *Laut Meldung gen den Mann an von der Ruhr*
> *Doch es war gen den Mann von Stalingrad.* (Brecht)

Susan Sontag reveals the problems of captions: "While the image, like all images, is an invitation to look, the caption, more often than not, insists on the difficulty of doing just that" (90).

Does Brecht see anything on the surface of this photograph, or does he merely clip it out as a piece of American invasion propaganda.

Obviously, he seeks to use his epigram to undermine what he considers inadequate representation. In combination with the epigram, the photograph is covered with a mesh of meaning, darkening that which was once visible: the chaos of the invasion. The photograph is inconclusive as to whether the soldier survives. With Brecht, he emerges from the waves like a mythical god. The man's identity in Brecht's work stems from the inherent dynamism of the language itself: the alliteration tells us the Man is from Maine, and not from Pennsylvania. Brecht constructs an emblem of war strategy and consequently erases contingencies.

The fuzziness of Capa's photograph may have made it seem more authentic and real for the readers of *Life* in 1944 and the media experts of 1994, but Brecht carves out all traces of disorder in his epigram. With Brecht, the soldier Edward from Pennsylvania becomes a marionette of a world historical process. Brecht's epigram stamps a MEANING to the photograph and at the same time tries to eliminate any visual element which contradicts his reading of the image.

The publisher of Brecht's book of poems titled *Kriegsfibel* ("War Primer") was his friend Ruth Berlau. In her preface to the work, she suggests the knowledge needed to decipher the meaning of Capa's photograph. To those who cannot discern the meaning of the four-line verse, Ruth Berlau explains:

> The 6th of June 1944 was D-Day, the start of the second front long-awaited by the peoples of western Europe. Long delayed, the American and English soldiers were sent across the Channel. The soldiers who jumped from the landing boats and waded through the waters thought they were giving their lives for the freedom of Europe. They did not know that they had only been sent into the battle after the Soviet army had already pushed Hitler's defeated troops back into Germany. (73)

This reminds us of the Soviet comments on the days of the invasion, which are disputed among historians. We only note that these captions reduce the level of photographic visibility.

Where there are competing stories, there will be a question regarding that authority which can decide what is authentic. In our case there is the authority of the editors of *Life*, later countered by Capa's authority as an eyewitness. We need the authority of a narrator or an eyewitness who can vouch for a story. If we demand that the photograph bear the burden of evidence, it must be verified by complementary texts. Evidence is always the result of negotiations.

Like every documentary photograph, this one does not speak only for itself. We need additional stories to accompany it. After all, the leakage of salt water could have been faked, and even the heat damage of the darkroom could be traced back to intentional manipulation in order to create the effect of "authenticity."

Back in 1962, Andy Warhol was already using the poor quality of newspaper photos of airplane crashes and car accidents. Using serial graphic technology, Warhol used the flawed grainy quality of newsprint to create a paradox effect. This brought attention to the photograph as a media event, which can be reproduced endlessly and at the same time, which allows the monumental picture to appear as a window to reality.

The photograph must find a frame to reach the level of a report in the face of "hard facts." How else are we to distinguish Capa's photograph of the invasion, with its high horizon line and lens splattered with salt water, from a picture from Steven Spielberg's movie *Saving Private Ryan* (1998)? Again, I am quoting Susan Sontag's article published in *The New Yorker* in December 2002:

> What assured the authenticity of Steven Spielberg's much admired re-creation of the Omaha Beach landing on D-Day in *Saving Private Ryan* was that it was based on, among other sources, the photographs taken with immense bravery by Robert Capa during the landing. But a war photograph seems inauthentic, even though there is nothing staged about it, when it looks like a still from a movie. (94)

If you know the movie story to be a movie story and think you know the conditions for the production, you will deny the film scene any authenticity, no matter how much it resembles the Capa photograph.

Wandering through different frames, the Capa photograph becomes a vibrating picture. The circulation of a picture includes the story of its making, the light settings, pressing a finger on the shutter release, the slant of light particles onto the registering layer of film, the chemical processes in the darkroom, the first photo captions, and the different stations at which the picture is so differently animated.

Robert Capa's photograph is a rectangle, trapped in the split second in which a camera secures a finding from the world as a black and white fact. There is no doubt that the taking of the photograph depended on the technical conditions of the apparatus, gained fame through its circulation in the mass media, was filed in the archives of cultural memory, and can therefore be reconstructed on different occasions.

At one time, it was a document, which attested to the willingness of a photographer to take risks and went up against the discourse of the governing powers. It got caught up in the noisy context of official signs and symbols of history. Can we separate it from this and tell its story regarding the media in order to rescue the visibility of the photograph from below the level of mythologies and uncover the traces of what is real?

III. Circulating reference. Behind the photo-icons: Stories

Despite the criticism of the documentary demands of photography, we can still hear the sigh that even a hard-core constructivist utters when it is time to move analogue photography into a museum. Astonishingly, it is Jean Baudrillard who remarks that only photography is capable of ripping its object out of the "noisy context of the real world." Baudrillard, who considers all media phenomena to be mere simulation, says: "The only deep longing is the longing for an object ... for that which is fully capable of existing without me" (Amelunxen 256-260). To him, photography is the only medium which can regain the isolated objects. As Roland Barthes noted, only photography can fulfill "the longing for reality" which "one is not able to touch anymore" (87).

In contrast to this concept of melancholy, the art historian Hans Belting insists that photographs form a mere archive of dead images, which we must revive. They are technically made into geometry, levelled off and classified: "places that are caught in the

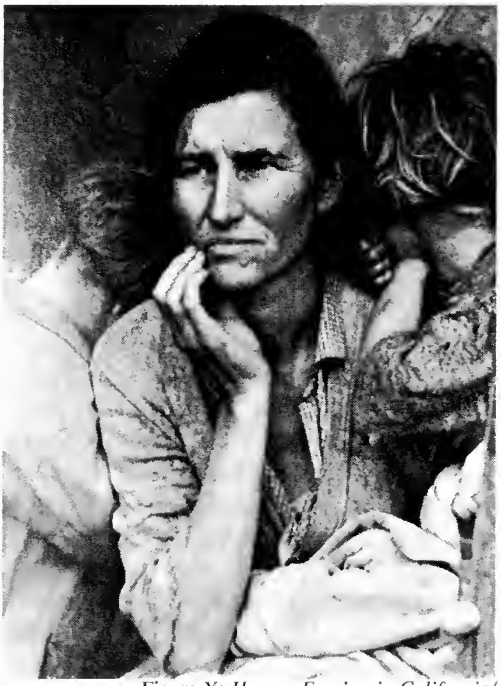


Figure X: *Human Erosion in California/ Migrant Mother*. Dorothea Lange. Nipomo, California, 1936.

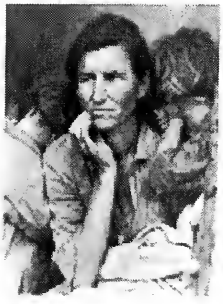
Figures XIa-d: *Migrant Mother Series.* Dorothea Lange. Nipomo, CA, 1936.

rectangle of a print, trapped in the time of the past." We animate these photographs in our imagination of the final non-presence of something once present in front of the camera. According to Belting, photographs only become images through the symbolic use we have for them (228).

Strangely enough, the next documentary photograph seems to meet both the ontological criteria of analogue photography and the scepticism of the art historian. It is a picture that tears its object from the "noisy context of the real world," yet at the same time documents its noisy context. It is a dead rectangle of black and white that comes to life through rules of imagination and brings reality into motion—through the force of its mythological implications for which it was named the "New Deal Madonna" (Figure X).

The picture *Migrant Mother, Nipomo, California* (1936) is the most widely recognized document from the coverage Dorothea Lange did on the seasonal crop workers in North America (Figures XI-XIII).

Dorothea Lange's camera captured the migrant harvester Florence Thompson in many poses during her stay in a pea-picking camp in Nipomo. At that time she was 32 years old and we see her surrounded by a tattered tent, unwashed dishes, and four children. The famous print isolates the mother from all concrete conditions of space and time. It is precisely these interventions that give the picture its appealing character. Champions and critics viewed the Migrant Mother "as resembling the holy family, thus invoking the



authority of traditional art as well as belief" (Busch 348-350).

Yet, as Sally Stein remarks: "As in devotional prayer before icons, putative resemblance to sacred objects may lead to inattention [. . .]" (Stein, *Whose Family Romance?*; Stein, *Passing Likeness*).

Dorothea Lange had approached the family slowly and, when taking pictures, given them the opportunity to pose if they wished. At first the children had looked into the camera inquisitively. Only in the last photo of the sequence did they turn away. The camera caught the moment and Lange decided to go with this motive, where the sisters are hiding behind their mother's shoulders, as if they cannot stand the shame of being archived thus by the eye of the camera. You can tell the story in another way, as Sally Stein does: "[. . .] Lange directed both older children to turn away (or waited until they had done so) while she moved in to make a vertical close-up of the mother who brought one hand to her chin while looking out and away, at the same time as she supported herself and the baby [. . .] with her other arm extended outward to serve as brace with her thumb latched onto the canvas-draped tent pole" (Stein, *Whose Family Romance?* 4). This is a story of a photographer and her model. The mother's look leads into the distance, as if she is trying to meet the indifference of the glass lens with indifference of her own.

CALIFORNIA FARM NOMADS

Thousands of Homeless Workers Harvest The Products of Field and Orchard

By KATHERINE GLOVER

Marysville, Calif.

A worker in the "peach bowl"

Figure XII: "California Farm Nomads." *The New York Times.* 10 Aug. 1936.

For people interested in semiotics and who examine the importance of the artistic makeup according to rules, Lange's photograph of the "Migrant Mother" is the result of a staging using the means of a

lens, a darkroom, and a cutter. It follows the age-old principles of composition: when two eyes of the person in a portrait are visible, we generally find one of them aligned along the center vertical axis of the picture. The subject does not look out of the picture to the right. The look from the right to the left helps ensure that the attention of the viewer does not leave the field of the picture (Liese). Lange chose to make the cut extremely narrow and followed the conventions of portrait painting, thereby enabling it to strike us as an archetypical picture once we have blocked out all of the contingency elements of the environment. There was one disruption, though. It was the thumb visible in the lower right edge of the photograph, which is faintly visible even in the touched-up version. Two years after the taking of the photograph, Lange went back and almost brushed it out, against the protests of those in charge of the archives. It became a "part of collective memory" for us at the latest in 1955 when it appeared in the exhibition *Family of Man,* which was seen by over nine million people (Museum of Modern Art, 24 Jan-8 May 1955).

This means that the use of old principles of composition eases our entry into the imaginary—and thus paradoxically promotes its documentary function in the framework of the governmental campaigns for the land reforms of the New Deal programs. Yet, how could this picture establish its canonical Marian qualities? Again, Sally Stein provides an answer: "Marian pictorial conventions lead us to expect that the eyes of the maternal figure will be focused on her children, or else cast downward to delineate a space of inviolable privacy, or else acknowledging us, if sometimes warily, anticipating the impulse of the outsider to enter the protected nurturing zone around the mother. But in this case, the mother seems conscious of neither the infant at her breast, nor the children at her sides, nor of us" (*Whose Family Romance?* 9). Stein concludes that "this picture lacked most of the sentimental cues that make the mother-and-child formula work." Sally Stein discovers the "real" motivation behind the picture. Dorothea Lange is emphasizing women's independence from traditional family roles. All her photographs show a strong ambivalence about the call of motherhood. "Her archives are filled with photographs offering quite contrary propositions: that most any male—father, grandfather, even brother—might nurture the child better than most females, mothers included" (*Whose Family Romance?* 12). Thus, one cannot consume the picture as an archetypical model of enduring motherhood as presented in the *Family of Man* exhibition.

There is another story behind the picture which fostered the icon. The picture's success is due in part to John Steinbeck's *The Grapes of Wrath,* which tells the story of the oppression of the migrants. Steinbeck had the photographs of Dorothea Lange and Horace Bristol in mind when

he wrote the novel. This circle of media reference expands with John Ford's film based on the novel in 1940. When he chose the actors, he used Bristol's photographs as a guide. "The parallels between physiognomy and posture were so astonishing that shortly after the premiere, *Life* magazine published a double page of layouts of photographs

Figure XIII: *Migrant Pea Pickers Camp in the Rain.* Dorothea Lange. California, 1936.

with the actors on set facing photographs taken in the migrant camp. One could hardly tell the difference" (Wefing). The spiral of myth-making and reference continues, however, by including the "Dustbowl Ballads" of the folk singer Woody Guthrie and Bruce Springsteen's record *The Ghost of Tom Joad.* It also includes the vehement criticism of historians who doubt the documentary status of Steinbeck's novel and Lange's photographs. Skepticism is cast onto the constructions of the photographer and the novelist (Windschuttle; Nugent).

The national icon of maternal fortitude provokes a series of challenges to its documentary authenticity (Stein, *Passing Likeness*). In 1988, Wendy Kozol treated the New Deal Madonna as an example of the Farm Security Administration's traffic in conservative stereotypes back towards the nuclear family. In 1989, the historian James C. Curtis questioned whether the presumed final figure was a true and absolute

documentation. It was not until 1979 that the photographed icon of motherhood was given a name: Florence Owen or Florence Thompson after her second marriage. Forty-three years after the famous photograph, Florence Thompson posed one last time with her children. After sixty years her ethnic background was finally discovered: the New Deal Madonna was a Native American of the Cherokee tribe. One wonders why "Nordic" features were attributed to this icon (Gerstle 180-181; Stein, *Passing Likeness*). Even as late as November 2002, Heinrich Wefing would write—without knowing the woman's ethnic background—that she would "cut a good figure in every country club" because she was the quintessence of the "pretty American woman," "the girl next door" as it were. How does the canonization of a picture erase that which is documented in order to simplify identification? Here, Sally Stein suspects a "cosmetic motive (arguably masking an erotic impulse) to re-imagine oneself and one's immediate relations with higher cheekbones and a more prominent 'noble' profile" (Stein, *Whose Family Romance?* 14).

The claim that Lange's photograph makes vis-à-vis documentation can thus be dismantled. So too Steinbeck's novel: This novel has been called a piece of "Marxist propaganda" that romanticizes Lange's photograph, and statistics show that the masses of migrants were later the core of voters who supported Reagan.

These critical interventions are extremely important, not because they could reveal the true source, but because of the question they dredge up: what is behind the constructions? They move the cultural field back into a state of ontological unrest and instability.

On the other hand, the story about the creation of these icons increases the documentary claim of the five-photograph series that did not gain as much fame as the Migrant Mother. They seem like raw material that had not been organized according to the rules of composition. Compared to the strong symbols of the icon, the signs of the abandoned photographs seem to be so weak that they appear to be a transparent window offering us a view of the real Florence Thompson, her tent, her children, and her things lying around. The aesthetic order of the mythical icon increases the impression of the raw material and the contingency of the discarded material. What had been sorted out of the cultural archive is now that which is most suitable to authenticate the story of chaos behind the icon.

It is thus *behind* the icon that we find stories which confirm our suspicion of a real event behind the icon. Of course, the photographs have to be animated to do this. The tendency towards animation is not guided by stories, but rather by the pictures' function and circulation, which ranged from their use in the New Deal campaign in 1936 to their

sale at auctions at Sotheby's. With their circulation in different contexts the photographs open new perspectives of reference for us.

At last, we can affirm our beginning considerations: Without a prior suspicion that reality gives off background noise, the viewer would not marvel at the discovery of an artwork's construction. The idea of background noise is established by the relationship between the viewer and the image, a relationship whose structure corresponds to that of the technical image.

The dynamics of the economy of mass culture are maintained by the search for events behind the surface of the media.

Notes

[1] The lecture took place on March 11, 2003.

[2] Bill Viola, *The Passions*, The J. Paul Getty Museum, Los Angeles, Jan. 24, 2003 – Apr. 27, 2003. I thank Prof. Dieter Thomae, 2002-2003 Residential Scholar at the J. Paul Getty Center for this reference.

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Gerhard Richter's Redemption of Terrorism As Dialectic of Ideology

Ulrich Bach

When all visions of reality become untenable, how can utopian ideals be meaningfully sustained? To address this question this paper explores the ideas of Karl Mannheim, Walter Benjamin, and the contemporary German artist, Gerhard Richter, concerning the relation between ideology and utopia and how those ideas can be viewed in light of recent postmodern conceptions of reality as multiple, shifting, and socially constructed. Arguing that the postmodern present denies utopian schemes as a penultimate vision of reality, I suggest that desires for utopian conditions nonetheless need to be satisfied. This desire seeks expression, not through visions of idealized possibilities in the future, but through a radical reworking of history and memory.

At the very end of *Ideology and Utopia*, Karl Mannheim proclaims nothing less than the end of history: "It is possible, therefore, that in the future, in a world in which there is never anything new, in which all is finished, and each moment is a repetition of the past, there can exist a condition in which thought will be utterly devoid of all ideological and utopian elements" (262). In the light of our *post-histoire* age, in which aesthetic teleology is replaced by a partial vision of 'anything goes', Mannheim could appear to be the postmodern sociologist par excellence. However, looking back to 1929, the year of publication, "Mannheim seems astonishingly unaware of the tremendous political changes yet to come in Europe" (Ricoeur 283). This might be a different type of utopia, a 'messianic aesthetic recherché', which not only transcends Karl Mannheim's utopian structure, but which also represents an alternative to today's expanding global liberalism and an apparent shift towards socially conservative politics.

Two vectors appear to order Mannheim's sociological typology: Utopia aims to *transcend reality*, and it possesses a *progressive time* scheme. Mannheim starts out to define utopia by distinguishing it from ideology. He then proceeds to classify various types of utopianism and concludes with an observation of the present state of imaginary constructs. Ideology and utopia both share an essence[1] (*Seinswirklichkeit*) that is non-congruent with the historical

situation in which they exist, and both evoke images transcending those of the present reality. Whereas utopia ought to shatter and overcome the worldly situation, ideological *Wunschbilder* serve to maintain the *status quo*. Yet sociology is not concerned with mere ideas and projections, but with that "concretely effective" (Mannheim 194) for human existence. The perception of the terms utopianism and ideology depends on each subject's position: A member of the ruling class is inclined to judge utopian thought as unrealizable imaginings, whereas someone outside of the power circle is more likely to view ideologies as non-congruent modes of deception by a society in which he or she has no sense of participation. Mannheim takes great pains to develop his argument for a non-historical, but constructive, classification of utopias. He is not interested in reviewing critically the various successive utopian novels (starting with Thomas More's narrative), but rather in defining and categorizing what makes a certain political imagination 'intentional'. He is very aware of the shifting historical perspective: What begins as a realization of a utopian vision appears—at a later stage—as a mere ideological promise that remains unrealized. Thus Mannheim's insistence on realization as the qualifying condition of utopia becomes more apparent.

Concluding his essay with an assessment of the contemporary situation, the sociologist presents the dialectical movement of utopian thought. In a moment when increasingly larger groups of society asymptotically approach a more congruent state of being (*konkrete Seinsbeherrschung*), utopian ideas will relinquish their visionary spell on the community. The chiliastic ecstasy, with its inherent striving for transformation, wanes as more and more people approach the socio-historical process in which they can actualize themselves. Even Marxist-Socialist utopias, while keen to unmask all other utopian visions as ideologies without reflecting on their own determinism, move towards the annihilation of their own utopian element, since sooner or later they must admit their own increasing determinism. This newly gained sobriety generates a general disintegration of totalizing worldviews and leads to a reduction from overarching philosophy to piecemeal sociology. "What was formerly a correspondingly unified and systematized *Weltanschauung* becomes, in the attempt to deal with individual problems, merely a guiding perspective and heuristic principle" (Mannheim 251). Each point of view is capable of recognizing alternating cross-sections from a different perspective of the overall picture. Thus the process of history in its entirety is—for

Mannheim—infinitely more universal and encompassing than each existing position can be on its own.

This situation, in which a discredited totality reveals an absence of spiritual validity, brings about a reduction to raw human drives. The lack of tension in this compartmentalized world leaves an empty victory of congruence, devoid of any spiritual, artistic potential. Mannheim rightfully questions this dire conclusion of the socio-historical progression. There are still various groups of people whose aspirations remain unfulfilled, and he contends that the eradication of our transcendent potential would destroy the human will, and ultimately, "with the relinquishment of utopias, man would lose his will to shape history and therewith his ability to understand it" (Mannheim 263). Hence, in the words of Gottfried Keller, the "ultimate triumph of freedom will be barren" (Mannheim 250). In an impressive passage immediately before the conclusion, Mannheim explains the dialectic conclusion one must draw from this empty victory:

> The disappearance of utopia brings about a static state of affairs in which man himself becomes no more than a thing. We would be faced then with the greatest paradox imaginable, namely, that man, who has achieved the highest degree of rational mastery of existence, left without any ideals, becomes a mere creature of impulses. (262)

Even if Mannheim falls short in his attempt to capture the reality of the historical moment, and even if his assessment of waning utopian ideals "in a world which is no longer in the making" (257) was premature, his idea that mankind—absent of utopian ideals—is reduced to a mass comprised of mere creatures of impulse anticipates Horkheimer's and Adorno's concept of the dialectics of enlightenment, in which an exuberance of rationality paradoxically results in barbaric irrationality. It remains to say that Mannheim's structure of utopia aims for closure in the name of progress, without being able to push the idea to a complete absorption of human utopian potential. He applies the Marxists' thesis of the essential determinism of thinking (*Seinsgebundenheit des Denkens*) to make the case that all our ideas are essentially determined and expressive of our socio-economic point of view. If we apply this insight to Mannheim's own academic writing, it would also appear to be merely ideological. It is precisely this axiom that would lead to his theory of utopia as ideology. In order to escape from this inherent,

compelling logic (*Systemzwang*), the sociologist creates a model of relationism in which the collective partial perspectives of the various subjective positions are more encompassing than the apparently objective and unified *Weltanschauung*. Perhaps Norbert Elias gives an answer to Mannheim's intentions when he writes:

> Despite his imperative concept of ideology, Mannheim ascribes to utopia, as it were, a special position beyond all ideologies. I have often wondered if this fact can be attributed to an instinctive attempt to save Socialism from becoming relativized as an ideology. (Elias 143)

To surpass Mannheim's utopian structuralism, the best point of departure is his insistence on *transcending reality* as a definition of utopia. This definition presupposes a binary opposition of reality versus utopia and concedes a stable reality, which utopia has to overcome. But how do we define utopia at a time in which the concept of reality has become increasingly superimposed by a ubiquity of images, information, and reproduction? The real has ceased to represent the true and original focal point toward which the utopian vision aims its transcending energies, and thus Mannheim's emphasis on political movements rather than works of art could resolve his increasingly closing totality of the political realm. As Andreas Huyssen recognizes: "[U]ltimately our culture as a whole is haunted by the implosion of temporality in the expanding synchronicity of our media world" (100). According to him, in this situation of multiple realities shifting toward nowhere (*u-topia*) and trending toward an unobtainable place in time, works of art could seize the opportunity by reframing the past along aesthetic lines. Huyssen identifies three registers of utopian imagination in the early 20th century. First, the historical avant-garde, which stretched from Dada to French Surrealism with its claim of sublating art into life that came to an end with the realization of the danger which lies in a (fascist) aestheticizing of politics. Second, a utopia of a radical new text with the notion of transcendence of the middle-class society, was proposed by artists on the left like Brecht and on the right like Benn and Jünger. It has a very similar impetus like Surrealism, but these political modernists insisted on maintaining the independent status of art. Third, a utopia of aesthetic transcendence that invokes another language, another music, or pure vision, proposed by artists such as Rilke, Kafka, and Kandinsky. Central to this project is a temporal experience outside of the regular

flow of time and a mere attainability as an aesthetic experience disregarding the socio-political reality of its time. All these modernist utopian projects with their various agendas of an aesthetic, social, and political transformation of society are superseded by the postmodernist project, which takes into account that the attainability of pure vision is a *temps perdu*.

Returning to memories of lost possibilities can function as a form of working through in fiction these developments and paradoxes, thereby resisting the lure of the simulacrum. By not merely aiming at transcendence, though with the sustaining help of the aesthetic, the utopian desire refocuses on the quest for a temporal breakthrough of the past. With the changed dimension of the utopian imagination, the 'pure vision' is no longer attainable, but the desire for it still has to be fulfilled. To break through the oppressive continuity of time, the artist creates a redemptive disruption, which ultimately aims at an alternative in the present and in the future. To counter the implosion of temporality in an age of media saturation Huyssen suggests that a "turn to history and memory can also be read as an attempt to find a new mooring. The reliance on memory in the social sphere marks a desire to resist the delimiting of subjectivity and disintegration of social cohesion" (100).

Utopias are customarily visions of future possibilities. Hence, at first it appears paradoxical to posit memory as a form of utopia. But our communal memory of past historical moments can be reinterpreted with utopian trappings. This occurs especially when the un-actualized possibilities in crucial historical moments are revisited. In this way, utopian memory can produce perceptive insights into the fissures and chasms of historical reality. To reactivate through a work of art past historical crossroads at which significant political decisions could have eventuated differently, is to enter an imaginary utopian realm. Looking back to those forgotten, but decisive, moments can serve as a beacon to remind us that progress always voids the alternative. Aesthetic memory not only heralds an opportunity to imagine a different course of history, but reconsiders traumatic and euphoric historical events, which are otherwise glossed over by the emergence of a comforting, yet constraining, national narrative.

In his seminal essay *On the Concept of History*, Walter Benjamin states that, contrary to common historicist perception, the past is not complete in itself, i.e. it is not fixed, but is tradition completed with an index, something that directs attention to some fact or condition, and it is that view of the past which carries the claim of redemption into the present. "Like every generation that preceded us,

we have been endowed with a *weak* Messianic power, a power to which the past has a claim" (Benjamin, *Illuminations* 246). History and the tradition of cultural treasures are written by the victors. Nevertheless, those treasures incorporate the toil and pain of anonymous contributors, and it is up to the artists and materialist historians to reveal it. "There is no document of civilization which is not at the same time a document of barbarism," thus the task is "to brush history against the grain" (Benjamin, *Illuminations* 248). In times of distress and danger, following Benjamin, a true glimpse of the past presents itself to the present, and for a brief moment in time this insight can wrest tradition and counterbalance an otherwise superficially glossed over conformity in the service of the ruling class, that is, the nabobs of the society. "For every image of the past that is not recognized by the present as one of its own concerns threatens to disappear irretrievably" (Benjamin, *Illuminations* 247).

Such an attempt to brush history against the grain, and to redeem the past in the presence, is imbued within Gerhard Richter's cycle of *October 18, 1977*, a series of 15 paintings made in 1988. The pictures deal with the Baader-Meinhof group, which launched a campaign of terrorism in West Germany in the late 1960s and early '70s. On October 18, 1977, three imprisoned leaders of the group were found dead in their jail cells, and though their deaths were reported as suicides, murder was suspected. The nature of this cycle of repainted police pictures evokes in the viewer a sense of the vexatious quality of historical truth. With sparse and direct paintings in various shades of gray, the artwork leads one to doubt the validity of the consensus view. At the time of these events, this view was that of a German state jeopardized by beastly militants. Surrounded by the silent cries brought to awareness by the daunting images of the dead perpetrators, the unyielding actions of the state persecutors appear in a new ambivalent light. Through the process of refraction, the images trigger the memory of unprocessed national history. The minimalist aesthetic form elevates the political content to a saliency of how historical events elude immediate, contemporary understanding. At the same time, however, Richter imbues us with a mediated temporal breakthrough that allows the imagination to ponder the utopian possibility that the state might treat differently those viewed as enemies of the state. Were that to occur, the resulting more idealized state action would be more consistent with the justice and restraint that a future state could embody. Yet, we still perceive it in the present as utopian—a state of future possibility—in contrast to the ruthless reality of the present.

> No matter how artful the photographer, no matter how carefully posed his subject, the beholder feels an irresistible urge to search

> such a picture for the tiny spark of contingency, of the here and now, with which reality has (so to speak) seared the subject, to find the inconspicuous spot where in the immediacy of the long-forgotten moment the future nests so eloquently that we, looking back, may rediscover it. (Benjamin, *Selected Writings* 510)

This is the kernel of Benjamin's model of the optical unconscious. Gerhard Richter's inspirational models (*Vorbilder*) were black-and-white police shots relating to the Baader-Meinhof group. At the time the publication of these pictures as news releases served to satisfy a collective desire of revenge, and a "wide-spread longing to see those prisoners dead" (Thorn-Prikker 128). Through Richter's artistic enhancements, the horrendous police photographs in their very smudginess awaken a new possibility of mourning. In this respect, Richter made painfully apparent the long lost moment in which a vexatious ruthless veracity lingers. These images reveal an experience of national cataclysm in which we are overwhelmed by the event that can only be understood belatedly after the fact. The cycle of the fifteen paintings functions as a site of memory and enables a present redemption of a crucial historic crossroad of West German society. In this sense, aesthetic recuperation creates Richter's utopian vision: "Art is everything: contrast world, sketch or rendering for something else, reportage; for only when we reproduce something, can it have meaning" (Thorn-Prikker 131). Richter regenerates with his radical paintings the deeds of the terrorists and tries to bring us to an awareness of the society on a new level. He embraces not only the events, but also the social forces at work: the unceasing plethora of media imagery that threatens to negate any individual vision. Without falling prey to taking sides, Richter manages to infuse the spectator in a dense negative atmosphere, luring him or her into a timeless space where temporality is momentarily unhinged.

The most striking image is the triptych of a young enigmatically smiling woman, tellingly called confrontation (*Gegenüberstellung*), in which she uncannily emerges from her timeless refuge but vanishes pensively without delivering her disheartening message. By the same token, her appearance fans a spark of hope, a beacon for the present spectator, that not even the dead will be saved from a victorious enemy. Paul Klee's *Angelus Novus*, who is facing the past and is pushed irresistibly backwards by a tempest from paradise into a daunting future, seems to deliver a similar message: "His eyes are staring, his mouth is open, his wings are spread. This is how one pictures the angel of history. His face is turned towards the past. The angel would like to stay, awaken the dead, and make whole what has been smashed" (Benjamin, *Illuminations* 249). It is

here, I would argue, that Richter meets Benjamin, where utter hope mixes with melancholy, and the utopian quest fights an uphill battle with ideology.

Although the bourgeois painter denounces a deliberate attempt to render a political accusation, he explicitly insists on unconscious forces at work: "I notice more and more how critical is the unconscious in the artistic endeavor – as if there were something hidden at work" (Thorn-Prikker 132). He does not want his artwork to appear as material for a specific German history lesson; ideally he wants to generate a critique of ideologies, fanaticism, and mental exuberance.

> First, the public claim of people, i.e. the not-private, but that which has precedence, the ideological motivation. And then the terrible force, the frightening power, of an idea to persist even unto death, for me is the most impressive and least explicable, that we produce ideas, which are not only almost always not only completely wrong and nonsensical, but which are dangerous above all else. (Thorn-Prikker 130)

In this respect, Richter was pleased with the acquisition of the cycle by the Museum of Modern Art in New York, where he sees the possibility of a broader reception focusing on the violent social struggle in our times, rather than confining the paintings to a merely German historical context.

Following Karl Mannheim, utopia ought to shatter and supersede the worldly situation, whereas wish-pictures in ideologies serve to maintain the status quo. Richter turns this concept upside down by branding the vicious *Rote Armee Fraktion* (RAF) actions as ideology. Simultaneously, he puts forward a utopian imagination by returning to a harrowing moment in which the state remained victorious only by crushing the hopes of the terrorists. Utopia is regained by transcending that violent ideology through revisiting our memory of the event. Richter's obsession with history and memory is not regressive or escapist; it occupies in Huyssen's words "a utopian position vis-à-vis a chic and cynical postmodern nihilism on the one hand and a neo-conservative world view on the other that desires what cannot be had: stable histories, a stable canon, a stable reality" (Huyssen 101). Through the complex aestheticization of vicissitudinous memory, Richter's RAF cycle searches for new moorings in a time where spatial and temporal differences are callously threatened. Richter transfixes Benjamin's "weak Messianic power" and redeems the claims of the forlorn past. With his courageous venture into the great tradition of political art from David's *Marat* to Picasso's *Guernica*, the bourgeois artist Gerhard Richter exposes the vexatiousness of a catastrophic past. Paradoxically,

the captivating negativity of the dead corpses fan the spark of hope for a future generation.

Notes

[1] Mannheim uses throughout "Sein" or "Seinsstufe," which the translator of the English edition renders as "state of reality."

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Hermann Sudermanns Die Ehre*: Ein Plädoyer*

Teut Deese

Eines Abends, mit zweiundzwanzig Jahren, ging ich ins Lessingtheater. Wie man als Student gelegentlich ins Theater geht. [...] Zum ersten Male spielte man das Stück eines Unbekannten, Die Ehre. Den Namen des Verfassers hatte ich flüchtig über einem Zeitungsroman bemerkt. [...] Ich konnte die Parkettmenschen nicht sehen. Aber ich hörte sie! Ihre begeisterten Stimmen und ihre zusammenschlagenden Hände. Es war ein namenloser Erfolg. [...] Ich saß verdrossen auf meinem Platze, fast wütend. Auch wenn ich absah von der Haltung der Zuhörerschaft: Es wuchs in mir beim Verfolgen dieses trivialen Werkes von Akt zu Akt ein Gefühl ... das nicht anders als eine körperliche Abneigung zu nennen ist. [...] Wesentliche Einwände lassen sich gegen diesen Dramatiker nicht machen. Außer etwa, daß kein echtes Haar an ihm ist. Man betrachte seine Werke. Sie zeigen: Falsche Interessantheit, falsche Rührung, falsche Leidenschaft und falsche Schlichtheit. [...] Man gehe Sudermanns sämtliche Gestalten durch und man wird sehen, wie wenige er zeichnete, die nicht verlogen sind. [...] Eine ganze Welt voll Unwahrheit ist die Welt der Sudermannschen Gestalten. Ein Durcheinander posierender Erscheinungen. Aus der Ferne erkennt man das Bemalte auf den Backen. Ja, wer gegen diese aufdringliche Lüge eine Abneigung spürt, wird ein Recht dazu haben. [...] Im Laufe der Handlung wird bei ihm jedesmal noch ein neuer Effekt, eine klobige Überraschung draufgeprotzt. [...] Der Geist der Gewaltsamkeit schwebt über den Stücken. (Kerr 20ff.)

Derart harsch urteilte der Theaterkritiker Alfred Kerr in seinem 1917 veröffentlichten Essay *Herr Sudermann, der D.. Di.. Dichter* über das Stück *Die Ehre* und seinen Verfasser. Diese Kritik blieb nicht ohne Folgen. Von Anfang bis in die 70er Jahre des letzten Jahrhunderts blieb Hermann Sudermann ein Stiefkind der Literaturkritik. Sämtliche Interpretationen der *Ehre* stammen entweder aus der Zeit der Erstaufführung oder aus den letzten dreißig Jahren. Doch auch dieses allmählich wieder aufkommende Interesse am Werk des seinerzeit ungemein populären Dichters, der dem naturalistischen Drama den Weg zu einem breiten Publikum geebnet hatte, ist nicht frei von Vorbehalten. Immer wieder werden auch heute die von Kerr zuerst geltend gemachten Einwände gegen Sudermanns auf den ersten Blick effekthascherische Dramatisierung seiner Stoffe wiederaufbereitet. Es ist daher nicht

übertrieben, wenn Erika Mann im Kommentar zur dreibändigen Briefausgabe ihres Vaters Kerrs literaturgeschichtliche Bedeutung wie folgt kennzeichnet:

> Alfred Kerr (1867-1948): Für Deutschland tonangebender Theaterkritiker ("Berliner Tageblatt"). *Vernichtete Sudermann*; war frühester und mächtigster Förderer von Hauptmann und Ibsen; Theaterhistoriker. (Erika Mann in Thomas Mann, *Briefe 1889-1936* 461, meine Hervorheb.)

Freilich distanziert man sich heutzutage vom rüden, geradezu feindselig anmutenden Ton Kerrs. Die historische Distanz läßt vieles in einem milderen Licht erscheinen. Man kann wieder das eine oder andere gute Haar an Sudermann finden, ohne sich selbst zwangsläufig dem Vorwurf der geschmacklichen Mediokrität auszusetzen.

Doch hatte Kerr Unrecht, als er *Die Ehre* wegen ihrer Konstruiertheit und ihrer Unglaubwürdigkeiten diskreditierte, den Protagonisten als "unglaublichen Putz, welchen nie ein Dichter hätte schaffen können" (Kerr 28) bezeichnete und das "Operettenfinale" (Witte 127) des Schauspiels als hanebüchen entblößte? Meines Erachtens ist diese Frage zu verneinen. Die kritischen Betrachtungen Kerrs, wenigstens was die Figuren und die Gestaltung des Dramas angeht, sind sämtlich treffend, seine Einwände nicht von der Hand zu weisen. Die daraus gezogenen Schlußfolgerungen aber sind ausgesprochen subjektiv und von individuellem Ressentiment verzerrt und verengt. Im Folgenden möchte ich darlegen, daß man, ohne Kerrs Behauptungen im Kern zu widerlegen, zu anderen Resultaten nicht nur hinsichtlich der Beurteilung der *Ehre* sondern auch des Dichters Sudermann gelangen kann, dann nämlich, wenn man sich nicht gegen die seinem Werk inhärente Vieldeutigkeit verschließt.

In einem der Gespräche mit seinem Biografen Christian Braad Thomsen erklärt Rainer Werner Fassbinder, warum er die Werke einiger Regisseure des Hollywoodkinos, das von den meisten anderen Autoren des Neuen Deutschen Films strikt abgelehnt wurde, so liebe und verehre. Diese Regisseure, so Faßbinder, besäßen die Gabe, im Einklang mit den Konventionen Hollywoods Filme mit Happy-End zu produzieren, welchem jedoch oft eine derartige Ambivalenz innewohne, daß man, bei weiterem Nachdenken, nicht umhin könne, diesen scheinbar versöhnlichen Schlußpunkt als äußerst unbefriedigend und beunruhigend zu empfinden. (Braad Thomsen viii)

Ähnlich steht es meines Erachtens um den Schluß der Sudermannschen *Ehre* bestellt. Deren scheinbarer "Operettenschluß" ist meines Erachtens trister, hoffnungsloser, mit einem Wort vernichtender,

als das Ende der von Kerr hochgelobten Dramen *Vor Sonnenaufgang* und *Familie Selicke*. Dort gibt es noch Hoffnung auf Besserung der *condition humaine*, bei Sudermann nicht.

Im Grunde genommen—das sei Ausgangspunkt dieser Analyse —steht und fällt die Interpretation der *Ehre* damit, wie man die Figur des Protagonisten Robert Heinecke beurteilt bzw. wie man dessen Beurteilung durch den Autor einschätzt. Von des ersteren Erfahrung bzw. der mehr oder minder erfolgreichen De(kon)struktion seines Wertehorizonts handelt das gesamte Stück. Sämtliche anderen Figuren sind diesem Prozess bei- und untergeordnet, selbst der Graf von Trast. Ihm kommt zwar im Stück eine besondere Rolle zu, doch ist es im Wesentlichen diejenige, die Entwicklung Roberts—ob es sich denn um eine solche handelt, sei fürs Erste dahingestellt—zu inszenieren und zu kommentieren. Auch die Problematik des Ehrbegriffs ist nur eine vordergründige und ebenfalls nur im Zusammenhang mit der Hauptfigur relevant, was sich zum einen daran zeigt, daß dieser Begriff bloß sehr oberflächlich und nur im Hinblick auf seine Genese bzw. seine soziale Validität, nie aber auf seinen tatsächlichen Gehalt hin diskutiert wird. Diese Art von Rhethorik kann nur in eine Relativierung und letztlich Verneinung des diskutierten Konzepts münden. So wird das Problem auch innerhalb des Stücks nicht gelöst und die Schlußworte des Protagonisten entbehren nicht eines zynischen Beigeschmacks von Seiten des Autors.

Sudermann legt—und darin liegt, meines Erachtens, einzig die Relevanz der zum Teil recht ausführlichen, wenn auch selten über bloßes Geplänkel hinausgehenden Begriffsdiskussion—die Konstruiertheit des Ehrbegriffs bloß und enthüllt so letztendlich auch die Konstruiertheit seiner Protagonisten bzw. ihrer Erlebnishorizonte, des Dramas als solchem und letzlich der menschlichen Existenz. Dennoch wird den im Stück hauptsächtlich von Trast vorgebrachten und daher—man entsinne sich, dass er, nachdem er seine Spielschulden nicht bezahlen konnte, das Leben eines „Geächteten" der „ehrenvollen" Selbsttötung vorzog—kaum objektiven Erörterungen darüber, was es nun mit der Ehre auf sich habe, in der Sekundärliteratur wesentlich mehr Aufmerksamkeit entgegengebracht als der Figur Roberts, der bei einigen Interpreten (z.B. Waldemar Kawerau) kaum in der Zusammenfassung des Drameninhalts erwähnt wird. Erst Bernd Witte macht in seinem 1978 veröffentlichten Aufsatz *Realismus der mittleren Schicht* auf diesen Sachverhalt aufmerksam:

> Nicht die im Titel genannte und die dramatische Handlung vorwärtstreibende Infragestellung überholter Ehrbegriffe steht nämlich in seinem Mittelpunkt, sondern die Problematik des

> gesellschaftlichen Aufsteigers, die einen Großteil des Theaterpublikums der beginnenden Wilhelminischen Ära unmittelbar betreffen mußte. (Witte 123)

Leider leistet auch Wittes ausgezeichneter Essay nicht die meines Erachtens für die Interpretation der *Ehre* unverzichtbare Untersuchung der Frage, wie Sudermann seinen Protagonisten konzipiert hat und welche Wirkungen diese Figur beim Publikum hervorzubringen angetan ist. Nur in diesem Lichte ist es möglich, den Schluß des Dramas zu beurteilen. Kann man angesichts des Erfolgs einer überwiegend negativen Figur noch von einem uneingeschränkten Happy-End im Sinne eines "Operettenfinales" sprechen?[1]

Zunächst fällt Roberts völlig unangebrachtes Pathos, sein mit dem Jargon des Elternhauses verglichen gestelzter Tonfall auf, welcher ihn, gepaart mit seiner Naivität, zur Zielscheibe des in den ersten acht Aufzügen vorherrschenden bissigen Humors Sudermanns macht. Der Heimkehrer hat keinerlei Verständnis für die Lebensrealität der Eltern, und seine anfängliche Sentimentalität weicht schon bald unangenehmer Pedanterie und elitärem Zynismus. So weigert sich Robert, dem Diener Wilhelm die Hand zu geben, er dünkt sich auf Grund seiner finanziellen Verhältnisse dem Angestellten des Vorderhauses überlegen. Robert hat in Indien "das Goldmachen gelernt" (Sudermann 15), er hat also gelernt, sich auf Kosten anderer zu bereichern. Diese Tatsache wird mehrfach hervorgehoben, beispielsweise als von seinem Geschenk für Alma die Rede ist:

> Robert: Es ist das Kleid einer Hinduprinzessin, das auf einem Kriegszuge von meinen Freunden erbeutet worden ist. Denk' dir. Rosa und golddurchwirkt!
> [...]
> Michalski (lachend): darauf habt ihr sie wohl splitternackig an einen Baum gehängt? (Robert sieht ihn groß an) (38)

Die lakonische Entgegnung des wenngleich seinerseits keineswegs positiv gezeichneten Schwagers entblößt hier deutlich nicht bloß Roberts Weltfremdheit, sondern auch seine Doppelmoral, wenn es um kapitalistische Ausbeutung geht. Letztere wird von Robert gutgeheißen und selbst praktiziert, wenn es ihm zum Nutzen gereicht, jedoch verflucht, wenn er darin eine persönliche Kränkung erblickt. Diese Haltung des Sudermannschen Protagonisten gemahnt uns an Friedrich Engels' Urteil über Goethes Werther: Dieser bezeichnete Werthers Ungenügen an den bestehenden Verhältnissen als "Jammerschrei eines schwärmerischen

Thränensacks über den Abstand zwischen der bürgerlichen Wirklichkeit und seinen nicht minder bürgerlichen Illusionen über diese Wirklichkeit" (Jäger 14). Ähnlich findet Roberts Verblendung über die eigene Position im kapitalistischen Kräftespiel ihren pathetischen Höhepunkt in der zwölften Szene des dritten Akts, wo sich sein Ungenügen an der Welt in einer wutschäumenden Tirade an die Mühlings ergießt:

> Wir arbeiten für euch...wir geben unsern Schweiß und unser Herzblut für euch hin...Derweilen verführt ihr unsre Schwestern und unsre Töchter und bezahlt uns die Schande mit dem Geld, daß wir euch verdient haben...Das nennt ihr Wohltaten erweisen!—Ich habe mit Nägeln und Zähnen um eurern Gewinst gerungen und nach keinem Lohne gefragt.—ich habe zu euch emporgeschaut, wie man zu Heiligen emporschaut...Ihr wart mein Glaube und meine Religion...und was thatet ihr? Ihr stahlt mir die Ehre meines Hauses, denn ehrlich war es, wenn's auch euer Hinterhaus war.—ihr stahlt mir die Herzen der meinigen, denn ob sie auch schmutzige Bettler sind, lieb hatt' ich sie doch, —ihr stahlt mir das Kissen auf dem ich mein Haupt niederlegen wollte, um auszuruhen von der Arbeit für euch—ihr stahlt mir den Heimatboden—ihr stahlt mir die Liebe zu den Menschen und das Vertrauen zu Gott—ihr stahlt mir Frieden, Schamgefühl und gutes Gewissen—die Sonne vom Himmel habt ihr mir herabgestohlen—ihr seid die Diebe—ihr! (158)

Schon Heide Eilert hat in ihrem Aufsatz *Hermann Sudermann: Die Ehre* darauf hingewiesen, dass "Robert Heinecken sich bereits zu weit von seinem Herkunftsmilieu, dem vierten Stand, entfernt [habe], um noch als glaubwürdiger Anwalt proletarischer Anliegen fungieren zu können" (Eilert 60). Sie interpretiert diesen Sachverhalt jedoch als einen von vielen Mängeln des Stücks, anstatt ihn als Symptom für die, meines Erachtens überwiegend negative Gesamtaussage der *Ehre* anzusehen.

Die Doppelmoral Roberts zeigt sich konsequent auf allen Ebenen des Stücks, in seinem gespaltenen Klassenbewußtsein, seinem selbst für die damalige Zeit rückschrittlichen Frauenbild und vor allem auch in der beschränkten Beurteilung seiner Schwester Alma. Ihr wohnt im Stück beinahe eine Spiegelbildfunktion für Roberts eigenes Vehalten inne. Er verurteilt, vor allem natürlich in Hinblick auf die als ein ungewolltes Resultat seines Versuches, die "Familienehre" wiederherzustellen, geleistete Entschädigung von Seiten der Mühlingks, das Vehalten seiner Schwester als Prostitution. Er versäumt es jedoch, bei diesem Urteil die zweifelhaften Vorraussetzungen seiner eigenen Karriere zu bedenken,

welche ebenfalls in einem Kuhhandel mit den Mühlingks seinen Anfang genommen hat. Nicht einem persönlichen Verdienst, sondern ausschließlich der durch das Vorderhaus geleisteten Wiedergutmachung für die durch einen Unfall geminderte Arbeitskraft des Vaters hat Robert den gesellschaftlichen Aufstieg zu verdanken. Unter anderm durch diese Vorraussetzungen ist Robert von vorneherein für die Rolle des tragischen Helden untauglich—er ist eben *nicht* zerrissen zwischen einem idealen und einem materiellen Anspruch, sein Problem ist lediglich die mangelnde Anerkennung seines Aufstiegs durch das von den Mühlingks repräsentierte Bürgertum. Diesem Aspekt wird in der Sekundärliteratur zur *Ehre* keine Aufmerksamkeit geschenkt. Waldemar Kawerau spricht von einem "Kompromißstück" (Kawerau 96), Eilert mahnt die "billige Theatralik des Schlußeffekts" (Eilert 65) an, und auch Franz Mehring kritisiert das Ende des Dramas als unzureichend:

> [W]enn wir nun zu wissen verlangen, ob er [Robert] in diesem Konflikt untergeht oder aber sich zum revolutionären Proletariat rettet, schiebt uns der Dichter anstatt einer dramatischen Lösung einen äußerlichen Theatereffekt unter, indem er seinen Helden durch eine Göttin und einen Gott aus der Maschine in das Wolkenland der kleinbürgerlichen Romantik entführen läßt. (Mehring 349)

Doch dieses "Wolkenland der kleinbürgerlichen Romantik" ist Roberts Lebenswelt und Erlebnishorizont, jegliches tragische Potential dieser Figur ist so nicht nur durch die Bedingungen seines Aufstiegs und durch seinen auf Ausbeutung der Arbeitenden basierenden Broterwerb, sondern auch aufgrund seines Mangels an realisitischer Selbsteinschätzung von Beginn an kompromittiert. Es ist nicht, wie Trast uns in seiner Pepe-Parabel glauben machen möchte, die niedere gesellschaftliche Stellung Roberts, welche ihm das Recht auf Satisfaktion nimmt, sondern—im Gegenteil—die Tatsache, daß ihn mit der Welt Trasts und der Mühlingks weit mehr verbindet als mit den Seinen. Robert ist eine Kompromißnatur, die, was ihre tatsächlichen Existenzbedingungen angeht, einer Lebenslüge aufsitzt—daher kann die *Ehre* nur ein Kompromißende nehmen. Dieses jedoch als positiv im Sinne eines Happy-Ends anzusehen bedeutet eine Verkennung der im Stück dargestellten Realitäten.

Es geht Sudermann offensichtlich nicht vorrangig darum, in der Tradition Toquevilles, Daudets und Sardous einmal mehr die Relativität des bürgerlichen Ehrbegriffs zu diskutieren. An seine Stelle rückt auch nicht, wie von Trast proklamiert, die "Pflicht" (im Nietzscheschen Sinne

des Sich-selbst-treu-Bleibens) sondern vielmehr die unumschränkte Macht des Geldes, welche es ihrem Gebieter ermöglicht, die Realität nach seinem Gutdünken zu definieren. So gerinnt sowohl die Wirklichkeit außerhalb des Dramas als auch die fiktionale Welt auf der Bühne zum Konstrukt, das von Menschen wie Trast in ihrem Sinne manipuliert wird. In diesem Zusammenhang ist auch die Äußerung von Roberts Mutter mit einer Schlüsselfunktion zu belegen. "Das kommt ja bloß in den Bichern vor" (93), lässt die Alte im dritten Akt angesichts der Entwicklung des Geschehens verlautbaren.

Sudermann zeigt in seinem Schauspiel anhand des Schicksals eines keineswegs eindeutigen Protagonisten die Hinfälligkeit eines althergebrachten Wertesystems angesichts der Omnipotenz des Kapitals. Im Verbund mit der Ambiguität Roberts steht der ironische Sachverhalt, dass jener einerseits das gesamte Stück hindurch als Zielscheibe des Sudermannschen Spottes herhalten muss und die völlige Demontierung seines Weltbilds erfährt, ohne wirklich eine Entwicklung durchzumachen, ihm andererseits jedoch—gleichsam wie im Märchen—aufgrund seines Fleißes und seiner hanebüchenen Naivität ein Happy-End zuteil wird. Doch auch das kann ein Trast, ein "Kaiser von Kaffeesacks Gnaden" (43) ins Werk setzen. Seinesgleichen allein ist es anheimgestellt, Begriffe zu definieren, Realitäten zu schaffen und Märchen wahr werden zu lassen. Dieser alles und alle versöhnende Märchenonkel, dieser rührige Beiseitesprecher, dieser weichherzige Freund und knallharte Geschäftsmann ist die personifizierte Allmacht des Kapitals, Gott und Popanz zugleich.

Die Art und Weise wie Sudermann in der Figur des Grafen die Allmacht des Geldes mit der Konstruiertheit bzw. Konstruierbarkeit der Wirklichkeit diesseits und jenseits der Theaterbühne vereint, nimmt Aspekte des Brechtschen Dramas vorweg. Nicht zufällig ist letzterer einer der wenigen, die sich zur Unzeit positiv über Sudermann äusserten. Folgendes Zitat aus dem Jahre 1928 ist vor allem in gegebenem Kontext interessant und aufschlußreich:

> Ich habe allerhand über Hermann Sudermann gehört, ich kenne gar nichts von ihm. Einmal habe ich ein Theaterstück von ihm gesehen [...] und kann mich heute nicht an das geringste von dem, was es enthielt, erinnern. Das ist natürlich kein Zufall. Die Werke Hermann Sudermanns, so schätzenswert sie vermutlich sind, liegen außerhalb des Vorstellungskreises, in dem wir leben. (Brecht 156)

Dieses halb ernsthafte, halb ironisch-apologetische Zitat Brechts lässt sich unterschiedlich auffassen. Bernhard Witte spricht in seinem Aufsatz "Realismus der mittleren Schicht" über Sudermann als einen Autor, der "schon zu Lebzeiten zum Anachronismus geworden ist" (Witte 121). In Anbetracht der doch stark der Klassik verhafteten Gestaltungsweise Sudermanns ist diesem Einwand sicher zuzustimmen. Andererseits ist vor allem die *Ehre* ein Stück, welches im positiven Sinne unzeitgemäße Züge trägt und sich darüberhinaus durch die Zeitlosigkeit seiner Problematik auszeichnet.

Notes

[1] Darüber hinaus scheint mir dieser Begriff ohnehin unangebracht, da er im Grunde eine so starke Typisierung der dramatis personae bedingt, wie sie bei Sudermann nicht gegeben ist.

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The Course of Evil: A Reading of Schiller's Die Räuber

Uche Onyedi Okafur

Objective

The world we live in today is full of people who yield themselves to the forces of evil to perpetrate all kinds of wickedness against humanity. Some of these people believe they have a justifiable reason for what they are doing, while some do so out of shared sadistic tendencies and derive pleasure from their actions. Some others still do it without knowing why and cannot help themselves. Most of these people, in yielding themselves, have submitted their consciences to these forces that they either do not reckon with or are oblivious of the "arm of recompense." This study assumes that Schiller's *Die Räuber*, behind the stormy scenario, which we see in the book, presents a systematic operation of evil, the way it finds its way into an individual or society and blossoms into a ravaging monster plaguing its "captive" until it brings it to the place of final arbitration. Related to this is the desire to highlight the inescapability of the "punitive justice." Recompense does not follow the wish of its target, but finds its course when the time is ripe and must lay its hands on the guilty.

Introduction

The development of any society is always in periods which are determined by the predominant tendencies and events of the times. The day-to-day life of the people is influenced positively or negatively by these tendencies. The influence of these tendencies in the life of a people is most remarkable in their artistic expressions owing to the fact that the artist belongs to the society and is under the influence of the prevalent character-determining tendencies of the society. He, in his arts, captures the spirit, the attitude, the psyche and all other underlying tendencies of the time and presents them aesthetically with the aim of reaching not only the cognitive but also the affective domains, thus creating an atmosphere for a possible change in the society. The position of the artist towards the society, whether positive or negative, is nourished by these tendencies which bear a strong impression on his work. Expressing the same view, Taylor argues:

> Inasmuch as an artist is as subject to the social realities of his day as his contemporaries from other walks of life, and inherits the same constellation of social and cultural circumstances as they do, there is a necessary interaction between him and his environment whether he eagerly seeks the raw materials of his art from this environment or whether he withdraws from it in fear, in anger, in despair, or in the name of realities of a different order. (Taylor ix)

The import of this statement is that the artist cannot separate himself from the realities of his environment. However much he tries, there must be impressions of these realities on his work. The fact of this statement could be gleaned from the *Vormärz* period of German literature during which there were three classes of artists—the restorations artists, who were advocating a return to the old order of absolute monarchy; the *Biedermeier* artists, who tried not to be involved in the socio-political issues of the time, and the *Junges Deutschland*, who were more or less revolutionary, advocating a new socio-political order. Be that as it may, while the first and last groups were actively involved in socio-political affairs, the second group, by reason of their conscious withdrawal, was no less involved. This conscious effort not to be involved turned out to be the landmark of their works—an impression of the realities of their environment (Rötzer 167). George Plekhanov expresses the same view: "The social mentality of an age is conditioned by that age's social relation. This is nowhere quite as evident as in the history of art and literature" (Eagleton 6). A writer does not necessarily need to be *écrivain engagé* before the impression of the realities of his time could be noticed in his works. Terry Eagleton puts it this way: "Every writer is individually placed in society, responding to a general history from his own standpoint, making sense of it in his own concrete terms" (8).

In the words of Plekhanov, "every art springs from an ideological conception of the world: There is no such thing [...] as a work of art entirely devoid of ideological content" (Eagleton 17). Schiller's *Die Räuber*, which was published in the year 1781, does not fall short of this standard. Schiller, being *un homme engagé*, could not do otherwise. He is described as

> An existentialist, but of a different order. An existentialist in that he never evades the grave reality of life and of actions in the stream of time, and accepted the consequences of actions as the final arbiters of their author's true intent. (Graham 6)

The properties of the society and of the time—classicism and the resultant inhumanity, the poverty of the majority of the populace, the vanity of the well-to-do, religious bigotry, the exploitation of the powerless and the struggle by the downtrodden are duly represented in the work. It also reflects the prevalent "expressional" tendency of the time—the *Sturm und Drang*—a movement launched in opposition to the societal order of the time.

The *Sturm und Drang* was a movement that thrived from 1763-1784. Its emphasis was on freedom, self-determination and self-actualization in disregard of the existent societal rules, order, practices, principles and conventions. The *Stürmer und Dränger* were a kind of "rebels", who never agreed with the societal order at any point, always criticizing the structure but unable to take any action to bring their vision into reality. Roy reports:

> The dilemma was a real one. In the petty stagnant circumstances of Germany, there seemed no outlet for the man who, driven by strong feeling, would impress his personality on the surrounding world. (Roy 149)

They believed that societal conventions were developed by the powerful for the purpose of inhibiting the unfolding and blossoming of the "genius" in man and to maintain the powerless under perpetual subjugation. Kleiß comments: "Es gab einen breiten Mittelstand, der aber politisch machtlos war. Jeder wichtige Vorgang konnte vom absolutistisch regierenden Hof aus verfolgt werden" (15). The system of governance in most German states was absolutism and the ruling figures were more or less a personification of the state. Rules, regulations, conventions and principles were usually proclaimed from the seat of government and in most cases to serve the interest of the ruling class and erode the rights, the freedom and the self-exercise of the subjects. In line with this, Eagleton comments that "[t]he function of ideology, also, is to legitimate [sic] the power of the ruling class in society; in the last analysis, the dominant ideas of a society are the ideas of its ruling class" (7). This view is further echoed by Arvon, who maintains that "the dominant ideas of each historical period must always be interpreted as the ideas of a class that a certain economic system has made the predominant power" (25). The *Stürmer und Dränger*, as crusaders of freedom, self-realization and self-actualization, were advocating the jettisoning of these inhibiting conventions to follow the prompting of the inner tendencies which will lead to full blossoming of the self. According to Kleiß: "In der Revolte gegen die Bildung als Konvention und—dementsprechend—gegen eine

Dichtung, die von Konventionen, Regeln, Gesetzen bestimmt ist, verkünden sie die Abkehr von jeglicher Regel" (17).

From the foregoing, we can see that the scenario in the society of Schiller's time was a tragic one; tragic on the side of the lower class, who existed in the society as mere objects of exploitation and a means for the ruling class; tragic on the side of the ruling class who have been for centuries the architects of the portrait of the society without being challenged but whose authority and claim to *Überlegenheit* has been a subject of serious doubt since *Aufklärung*;[1] tragic on the side of the middle class—the intelligentsia and the bourgeoisie—who, against the background of political weakness and numerical inferiority, have taken up the struggle against the very powerful ruling class. George comments: "The main source of the tragedy lies in the hero's inability to put into practice the ideals he has set himself. He fails in his task because external forces are too strong and he himself is too weak" (George viii).

The tragic scenario as described above, the characteristic feature of Schiller's time, follows the principle of cause and effect whereby one evil triggers off a reprisal which, in itself, becomes another evil and the whole process becomes a chain of events leading to a dark alley with death being one of the options. This is typically the picture presented to us in the book *Die Räuber*. This article investigates the chain action and reaction of evil, the elements that came into play to sustain the course of evil up to its terminal point—*punitive justice*.

The Origin of Evil

Evil as a phenomenon is not just the doing of nature, but develops out of the interaction of the people with the elements and acts of nature as well as the institutions, conventions, distribution of rights and privileges and practices in the society. That is to say, nature is inheritance but how we interact with this inheritance goes a long way to determine what our experience will be.

The origin of evil in *Die Räuber* is traceable to the Moor family and further, within the family, to the acts of nature in the two sons—Karl and Franz. This could be seen in the discriminatory endowment that nature made in the two boys. Graham expresses this discrimination thus:

> Karl, [...] is a charismatic figure. Looks, temperament and an indefinable native princeliness combine to make him the first in love in the eyes of his father and all those who know him. [...] While Franz, 'der kalte, trockne, holzerne Franz' [...] goes empty-handed. A literary descendant of Richard III, Franz is blessed with a burden of excessive ugliness. (Graham 94)

This discriminatory act of nature prepared the ground for incompatibility while the way the society reacted to this difference created the evil that followed. Karl was "the first in love in the eyes of his father and all those who know him" (Graham 94). This fact is reinforced by Daniel when he penetrated Karl's disguise, "[m]any's the cake and the biscuit and sweetmeat I've tucked into your hand, you were always my favorite" (118). This situation could also mean that Franz was discriminated against in the court, in the neighborhood and in the whole society; a situation that could provoke a sense of fear, caution and insecurity.

Another way nature contributed to the scenario role of nature is that Karl, the one with all the positive adornments was the first born. This position means that Karl was the heir designate to the Moor family. Ilse Graham, commenting, states: "Unaccountably, by nature's arbitrary decree, he usurps by his very being what might be his brother's portion" (95). This would not have been a factor to reckon with had the family and the society not continued the discrimination of nature against Franz. Therefore, the social atmosphere in the family and society awakened Franz' consciousness to the fact that he could be standing alone. As a result, he had to take his fate in his hands. He convinced himself that to insure his survival and self-establishment, he must intimidate the threat of the unfriendly situations that surround him. Pursuant of this, he resolves to jettison all the existent conventions and social norms, mores and rules of the family and society that would be a hindrance. He states his driving philosophy thus:

> She (nature) gave me nothing. What I can make of myself is my affair. Each man has the same right to the greatest and the least, claim destroys claims, impulse destroys impulse, force destroys force. Might is right and the limits of our strength our only law. (Lamport 33)

In his drive to secure a juicy future for himself, his targets were nature, which discriminated against him from the onset, and society, which has continued that discrimination.

Nature and society prepared the ground for what Karl became. As it has already been pointed out, Karl was the darling of everybody because he was adorned with all good things that nature could give to any human. The situation of incompatibility between the two brothers and the consequent discrimination against Franz made Karl see him as the admired and favored son, after which he developed and followed wild and unusual tendencies.

> The fiery spirit that burns in the lad, ...that makes him always yearn so keenly for every kind of beauty and grandeur; the frankness that mirrors his soul in his eyes, the tender feeling that melts him to tears of sympathy at any sight of suffering, the manly courage that sends him climbing hundreds-year-old oak trees and leaping ditches and fences and foaming rivers, the youthful ambition, the implacable constancy; all these shining virtues that took root in his father's favourite son, ... (28)

Probably by reason of extravagant indulgence with which he was handled, these tendencies were not controlled, they ripened and made Karl become a very wild man and he started living a very riotous life. Garland reports that, "Karl the elder one is at university, where he lives riotously" (*Oxford Companion* 696). Karl was wholly favored by nature and subsequently spoilt by the society that he began to see life as a stage where he could play the games of his pleasure without any responsibility tag. He summarized life and living just in terms of feelings and instincts. Graham talking of Karl described him as "a creature of instinct rather than reason" (97).

This emphasis on feelings and instinctual drives is a cardinal element of the *Sturm und Drang* movement. Although *Die Räuber* was published long after the movement had died down, it bears tremendous impressions of the *Sturm und Drang* philosophy (Garland, *Oxford Companion* 696). This could be gleaned from the tendencies of the two principal personalities of the play, Karl, the victim of instinctual drive, representative of the *Stürmer und Dränger*, and Franz the villain, representative of the powerful but evil ruling class of the society on one side and the intellectual and reason driven society (Rötzer 97). In the struggle between the two brothers we could see the class struggle that characterized this period of history. Karl, having dropped from the "polished" class, as a result of his untamed instinctive drives, becomes a crusader among the "unpolished" class against the "polished" class (28).

Karl had shown a craving for freedom right from his youth. His pursuit of this freedom against all sorts of restrictive courtly and societal norms meant unavoidable conflict with the society; he must stamp on prevailing social norms so as to satisfy his cravings. Graham remarks: "Karl's higher promptings, his fidelity and his rectitude have indeed been displaced by the upsurge of excessive instinctual drives" (104).

From the above, it could be seen that the two brothers were victims of circumstances—nature and society—and turned out to be rebels against nature, as we see in Franz, who tries to reverse what nature has

done by refusing to recognize and respect it, and against the society by jettisoning the norms of the society in pursuit of their desires. Graham's observation is: "Both brothers are unusual characters, and both repudiate in terms which are strikingly similar, the laws by which ordinary men feel themselves bound" (96).

Although, no light is shed on the kind of interpersonal relationship the two brothers had in the family, if the lamentation, "oh my brother, my brother! You have made me the most miserable outcast upon earth, I have done nothing to offend you" (120), is anything to go by, it could be pointing to a situation of no display of open rivalry. Moreover, with Karl being the "Esau" by reason of his adventurous life and Franz being the "Jacob" by way of staying in the house, it could be deduced that their ways never crossed and as such there may not have been any open crises between them. Graham highlights this as he talks of legitimacy as something bestowed by nature and not something that can be earned and links this to Karl's "inborn superiority" over Franz for which "he does not try" (Graham 95). The absence of open crises does not, however, mean that Franz had not conceived his sinister ambition even then. It follows logically, that this "inborn superiority" of Karl's has an "inborn inferiority" in Franz attending to it. The consequent outcome is a "concealed jealousy."

If there could have been any problem somewhere along the line, Karl's departure to Leipzig on exile and his "riotous living" (Garland, *Oxford Companion* 696), which was unimaginable within the circles of nobility, probably gave Franz a kind of assurance and hope that he was gone for good and having heartlessly removed his father, he becomes and assumes the position of the master as testified to by Daniel, "And to be sure, with you coming alive again so uninvited - Your brother was the late master's only heir" (119). This false hope that Franz nursed is what really makes Karl's letter tremendously important in the whole episode. It triggered on this side the first manifest act of the evil that followed because it hit directly at Franz' cherished ambition and hope. To salvage this ambition and dream, known by him alone, Franz had to set to work immediately to neutralize any chances of his brother's declared homecoming becoming a reality.

On the other side, Karl, who seems to have had enough of this "riotous life" (Garland, *Oxford Companion* 696) and has initiated a move to facilitate his returning home, did not know that his proposed return meant a threat to his brother's ambition. In his innocence, counting on his father's love, he was more than sure he was going to return home. He expresses his expectation thus: "... In the shady groves of my father's home, in my Amalia's arms a nobler pleasure waits for me. ... I am not

shaking. Why should I be shaking? Comrades! That letter—rejoice with me! I am the happiest man on earth, why should I tremble?" (41) The banishment letter he received in reply was a bang, the impact of which unleashed the terror that ravaged the Bohemian society. After reading the letter he laments:

> Wickedness I have learnt to endure. I can smile when my arch-enemy is drinking my blood; but when blood kinship turns traitor, when a father's love becomes a raging fury; oh then catch fire, manly resignation, be as a ravening tiger, gentle lamb, and let every fibre stiffen to hatred and destruction! (48)

This threat he made good as the opportunity presented itself through Spiegelberg, the evil genius in the gang. He readily accepts the offer of becoming the captain of the budding band of robbers. In accepting the responsibility he declares:

> See, the scales have fallen from my eyes! what a fool I was, to seek to return to the cage! My spirit thirsts for deeds, my lungs for freedom—murderers, robbers! At that word I trampled the law beneath my feet—man showed me no humanity, when to humanity I appealed; so let me forget sympathy and human feelings! I have no father now! I have no love now, and blood and death shall teach me to forget that ever I held anything dear; oh my amusement shall be the terror of the earth—it is agreed, I shall be your captain. (49)

Nature and society, as discussed above, have played their roles, which could be seen as remote. They provided the stage on which the tendencies that controlled the actions and activities of the two men were nurtured. However, the impact of the two letters, one from each side, could be seen to be the immediate cause. It detonated the crises that exploded. The two letters could be said to be explosive because they convey disappointments over two incompatible ambitions existing in two irreconcilable quarters—Karl's ambition of returning to the family which invariably means his taking his rightful place as the heir to the Moor family, and Franz' ambition of emerging the only heir to the family.

The Portrait of Evil

Deceit

In most cases, societal evil bears a human face. The evil doer camouflages his activities with human apparel and presents himself as being in the service of humanity. In this human face lies the deceit, which is a principal element in his activities even as seen in *Die Räuber*. Deceit plays a major role in the activities of these two men—Karl and Franz.

On the side of Karl, deceit is manifested as self-delusion. Karl believes himself to be a crusader for the emancipation of the oppressed class from exploitation, subjugation and all sorts of inhuman treatments. "Karl, der ältere, ist [...] kein Schurke, aber ein Ungeheuer[, i]ndem er Gerechtigkeit schaffen will und den einen hilft" (Rötzer 97). He declares:

> Did you ever dream that you are the arm of a greater majesty? .... Today, today an invisible power has conferred nobility upon our handiwork! Bow down in adoration before him who decreed you this sublime fate, who led you to this place, who deemed you worthy to be the terrible angels of his dark judgment. Uncover your heads, kneel in the dust that you may stand up sanctified." (137)

Karl did not use deceit per se. He was rather a victim of deceit by his self-delusion. His beliefs and dreams deceived him into pursuing a 'just' course using the most terrible methods. Although he believes and presents himself as a crusader of justice and right, his activities say otherwise about him. His atrocious activities have no discrimination and sweep like a *Harmattan* fire in the savannah. Most of the victims of his deeds are people from the social class that he is fighting to deliver. Instead of the saviour, which he believes himself to be, he becomes a monster that strikes terror in the hearts of everyone—young and old, rich and poor, master and servant, slave and free.

The act of deceit is more pronounced and more active on the part of Franz, who uses it as a tool, in fact, the principal tool with which he pursues his goals until there is no way further for him. Franz is the personification of villainy, inhumanity and contempt and his tool is deceit (70-71). The first victim of this deceit is his father, whom he deceives into allowing a curse and banishment to be placed on Karl, the heir to the family Moor.

A mail had come in from Karl conveying his apology to the father and the family for all the unacceptable things he had done as well as a desire to return to the family. Franz gets this letter, distorts it into an

incriminating letter and uses it in his deceit. He uses all sorts of arguments and pretended concern to give the impression of being a loving and caring son. "But I am afraid—I don't know—whether I should—your health—father, are you really quite well?" (25) However, as Garland observes, these opening words are pregnant with deceit, part of a calculated, far-reaching, wicked plan. Yet in themselves they appear harmless, colorless, spontaneous, and natural (Garland 5). He had to do all these to prepare the grounds for his plans by first of all changing his father's opinion about him and earning his father's confidence and trust having been a son not cherished and appreciated in the family. After reading the letter he expresses a pretended doubt over the content thereof: "Do not believe it, father! Do not believe one syllable he writes!" (27) Having achieved confidence and trust in his father, he launches his mission. He tries to persuade the father, a very religious man, drawing arguments first from social realities— "so you said. And now, have you found it so? You envy the wretchedest of your peasants that he is not the father of this son—sorrow will be yours as long as you have this son. That grief will grow with Karl. That sorrow will undermine your days" (30)—and then from the Bible. Here again, we see his attempt to give the impression of being religious, something that was a common identity of the society then: "but it is written, if thine eye offend thee, pluck it out; it is better for thee to enter into the kingdom of God with one eye, than having two eyes to be cast into hell fire" (30). Franz succeeds in deceiving his father into punishing Karl. He does not stop there, but goes further to win for himself the responsibility to write the letter. This gives Franz the whole room he needed to execute his sinister plans to the fullest. With the permission to write the letter, he is unstoppable. This marks the beginning of the heinous events that troubled the society of Bohemia and liquidated the Moor family.

With Karl banished, the next step was to get his father out of the way and to win the courtiers over to his side without appearing evil to them at this stage at least. Again, his instrument, deceit, comes into play. He cajoles Hermann into becoming a kind of advocate for him and an active accomplice. He plays a very prominent role in the plan that sees the Old Moor out of the way, whereby another forged letter is used to reduce the Old Moor to a swoon before sentencing him to the dungeon to starve to death. Although, Hermann was an operational accomplice in the plan, his loyalty was very questionable following what followed much later. One wonders whether he just acted the survivalist by playing along with the new master just to save his head.

Daniel, the old steward, does not betray his loyalty to the legitimate authorities of family Moor, and when he refuses to yield to the

deceit of Franz, coercion is tried to get him to kill the Count from Mecklenburg. Amalia, Karl's betrothed, is not spared this campaign of deceit, although all the attempts to get her to forget Karl and accept Franz in his stead failed woefully.

Unrelenting grip

Judging from the way Karl and Franz were seized by the power of evil, described by *Chambers* as something "which produces unhappiness or calamity; harm; wickedness; depravity; sin" could be seen as a spell that so wholly possesses anyone in whom it has found an anchor that he is unable to retrace his steps from doing evil. It arrests the individual and poisons his power of reasoning and his conscience, subjecting him to a position wherein all his thinking and feelings will always be in justification of his activities. Even in situations that he is really conscious of the effects of his actions, he is always unable to reverse his course. Karl and Franz manifest this tendency albeit in different ways. Ilse Graham comments:

> However much he tries to dissociate himself from his accomplices, and his intentions from the consequences of his doing, he is caught up in an irresistible impulse to identify himself with his choice. ... The consequences of his actions catch up with him and, step by remorseless step, he finds himself more deeply implicated in a situation he utterly detests. (Graham 101)

Karl launches his onslaught against the society and gets information on the scene his band leaves on their wake. He is touched by this and regrets every bit of it and tries to distance himself from these facts. The report of the expedition against the city of Bohemia in the bid to save Roller filled him with much contempt that he exclaimed in disgust: "I played with Jone's thunderbolt and hurled down pigmies while my task is to shatter titans" (84). The old, children, the disabled and all the people who could not escape on their own were the victims of the attack, while the real targets—the ruling class and their arms of violence and injustice—were untouched. Probably because, as E.G. George comments, "external forces are too strong and he himself is too weak" (viii). In spite of these feelings of regret and disapproval after a painful reflection, Karl does not only remain the captain of the marauders but recommits himself to them more irrevocably. "Here I raise my dagger—as truly as my soul draws breath I swear—swear I will never forsake you...By my Roller's bones! I swear I will never forsake you!" (100) He cannot free himself from the grip of evil.

Karl tries so much to place a distinction between his intentions and the consequences of his activities in order to achieve justification for himself and his group as well as suppress the accusing voice of guilt. However, he is unsuccessful because the naked truth is always staring him in the face. In this circumstance, we see the self-delusion, which robs him of the ability and sanity to evaluate his activities critically so as to grasp the reality of it all. In all his reflections, he was overpowered by his sentiment and emotion-determined resolve to fight against injustice. The circumstances of his existence reinforced this usurping instinct and the resultant self-delusion that he can change the society by his power.

It is important to point out here that, in spite of the unyielding power of evil under which grip he is, Karl still had interludes of sober reflection by which he was able to evaluate his activities and express some disgust over them. This is possible because his resolve to launch a crusade of vengeance and punishment against the society was an outcome of instinctive swoop and not of reason. Therefore, from time-to-time he experienced instinctive emotional awakening, which would put the moribund ember of his conscience aglow to reflect on his activities. But, as already stated, the more he justified his actions on the grounds of his intentions, the less his conscience was able to condemn him and the deeper he sank into evil.

On the side of Franz, it could be said that he is so possessed by evil that he could not even pause to reflect on what he was doing. His resolve, his activities and his aim are moving in a definite direction; they are planned, weighed, rehearsed and adopted before they were launched. Therefore, there is no need for reevaluation. He does not regret any of his actions and he lets his plan unfold systematically. He locks out his conscience and allows it no place in his enterprise. Of conscience, he says:

> Conscience—yes indeed! An excellent scarecrow, to keep the sparrows from the cherry-tree! And a well written cheque to keep the bankrupt too at the last moment. ... yes indeed most admirable devices to keep fools respectful and to hold down the mob, so that clever people can live in better comfort. (33)

His resolve to do evil was informed by a well-calculated intellectual design and the justifying ground, which created the reasoning, still exists imposingly and determines all his actions (Lamport 32-34). The power of evil blinds Franz so that he has no regard for God and for the norms of the society in his maneuvers to achieve self-assertion. He mocks at God and all those who manifest the fear of God. He declares to

Daniel: "There is no God! Now I am talking to you in earnest, I tell you there is none! And you are to muster all the argument you have at your command, but I shall blow them away with the breath of my lips" (144). The obsession for wealth and glory was so strong that it did not allow any thought that could have been towards God. Where, therefore, could any cautioning thought have emanated from or have been directed to?

Contrary to Karl, with whom we see interludes of sober reflection on his activities, Franz did not have such opportunities because, as has already been pointed out, his resolve to do evil was the outcome of reason and not instinct. Instinct and emotions always fluctuate and any resolve based on them fluctuates along but reason is always strong and inversely, any resolve that is based on it is always strong and not easily changed. It is because of this fluctuation that Karl has moments of self-discovery such as we have below: "But why this burning hunger for happiness? Why this ideal of unattained perfection? This looking to another world for what we have failed to achieve in this?" (130) Towards the end of the drama, we find: "Oh, fool that I was, to suppose that I could make the world a fairer place through terror, and uphold the cause of justice through lawlessness" (159). Franz, in whose case there is no fluctuation declares: "Our gouty, splenetic moralist. If a conscience may chase wrinkled hags out of brothels, and torture old usurers on their death-beds—it will never get a hearing with me" (116), and towards the end "I cannot pray—here, here! all day, all withered. No, nor will I pray—Heaven shall not have this victory, hell will not make this mock of me" (149).

Karl acknowledges this subjugating power of evil in the interview with Kosinsky. In the discussion, we see Karl's regret over the pitiable circumstances of his existence in which he is helpless having jumped over the "chasm." He alludes to this as he exclaims: "Oh thou fearful key that will lock the prison of life behind me, and unbar before me the dwelling of eternal night—tell me—tell me—where wilt thou lead me?" (131). He tries to educate Kosinsky on the realities of the life he is so fascinated with. "Be warned, ambitious youth! Murderers earn no laurels! Bandits win no triumphs with their victories—only curses, danger, death and shame" (103). In his bid to help him not to take the erroneous leap he (Karl) has taken, he advises him:

> See how deep is the abyss, before you jump into it! If there is still one single joy known to you in this world...here you step beyond the bounds of humanity...once more, my son! If one single spark of hope gleams anywhere within your life, then leave this terrible alliance which only despair can make...Believe me, a man can think it strength of mind, and yet at the last it is

despair—Believe me, me! And go back, as quickly as you can. (103)

Graham comments on this meeting as follows: "Thus in him Moor sees himself make his fatal choice all over again. As he witnesses the youth's first step towards outlawry, he realizes how far he himself has walked along the road of no return" (102).

The power of evil has its grip on the throat of conscience. It continues to tighten its grip as more evil is perpetrated until conscience is choked into a comma. Man then becomes an agent of unimaginable bestiality. This is evident in the way Franz revels in the anticipation of the next sinister action he plans. After he had perfected the plan for the elimination of the Old Moor he declares:

> For do you see, in this way we shall achieve all our goals at once, and quickly. Amalia will give up all hope of him. The old man will blame himself for his son's death, and—he is sickly—a rickety building does not need an earthquake to bring it crashing down...Amalia will have lost all support, and will be the plaything of my will, you can imagine... (61)

This is again evident in the manner the robbers give account of their expeditions as witnessed in Spiegelberg's narration of the attack on the nunnery (72-73) and Schufterle's account of the abandoned helpless baby that he threw into the flames (83). Karl displays this tendency as he is overwhelmed with lust for vengeance against his brother, "...here I swear, and may nature spew me forth from her creation like a venomous beast if I break this oath, swear never to greet the light of day again, until the blood of my father's murderer, spilt before these stones, shall smoke beneath the sun" (137). Garland captures this obnoxious attitude of deriving joy from villainy: "its brutality is made all the more frightening by this mood of callous enjoyment...and the point here is not the horror of the action but the cold callousness of his account" (21), talking of Spiegelberg's and Schufterle's accounts.

The two men—Karl and Franz—we can see have become slaves of the power of evil. However, while Franz was systematically executing a well-articulated evil plan, Karl was staggering along step-by-step at the prompting of unfolding circumstances. The magnitude of the power of evil we can appreciate more if we look at Karl's activities alongside Amalia's testimony: "My only one is like the light of heaven itself, and heaven is grace and mercy! He could not bear to hurt the merest insect—his soul is as far from thoughts of blood as the pole of day from midnight"

(123). This same Karl of whom it was thus said has become a monster to the society of Bohemia, carrying out a crusade of terror.

The paradox that emerges here presents the two pictures of Karl—once an angel but now a villain. This duality of personality, which has all along been blanketed by his subjugating instinctive upsurge and the conscious efforts to see and evaluate his activities through the prism of his intentions, is unveiled in such a stark way and in such an environment where its impact will be most felt. In the environment where love and kindliness have created an angel out of him, he now stands a villain in disguise before the very person to whom he was an angel.

The Torment of Evil

> *The doom of misery is represented as the just consequence of criminality, and the chief punishment of the offender is the intolerable mental anguish of his own guilty mind.* (Robinson)

For anyone who does evil, there is always a conscious effort to stifle the mocking voice of the evils done. However much one tries, this endures for a while. There comes a time that the voice of the evil done can no longer be silenced and it comes up loud. It is in this voice that the torment of evil lies. This voice comes up more irrepressibly when the power to do evil has left us and all the principles, philosophies and beliefs with which we have insulated our thoughts begin to collapse, rendering our thoughts accessible to uncensored stimuli. The Pastor expresses this situation thus: "The thought of God will arouse a fearful neighbor that is called the Judge" (146).

Karl is always a victim of this tormenting voice as could be gleaned from the following statement: "A week ago and more I wrote to my father begging his forgiveness. I did not conceal the slightest detail from him, and where there is honesty, there too is compassion and a helping hand" (41). Karl was living a riotous life and was perpetrating various kinds of anti-social adventurous acts as he boasts: "My spirit thirsts for deeds, my lungs for freedom—murderers, robbers! At that word I trampled the law beneath my feet" (49). However, he writes to his father asking for forgiveness. It is on the platform of remorse that apology stands and remorse itself is a response to that accusing voice of evil done. Garland remarks: "The acknowledgement of crime can be an act of conscience" (*Schiller* 24). It is noteworthy that the evils he did in this phase of his life were out of the same adventurous tendencies that led to his going into exile. This could be the reason why it was easy for him to offer apologies for his deeds and ask for permission to return home. Now in the second

phase, where he had made a conscious decision to launch a crusade of punitive vengeance against the society, it becomes more difficult for him to retrace his steps however much he tries. This is because the reason underlying any decision always comes alive before any provocative circumstances to evoke a reaction. In Karl's case, the interpretation of this reaction is usually 'deeds'. As soon as he entered the second phase of his anti-social activities, the grip of evil became stronger and the accusing voice thereof more tormenting.

The torment that Karl is experiencing originates from the conflict between his moral consciousness and sense of justice and the effects of his destructive expeditions against the society. The outcome is a frequent occurrence of near fatal instability that would sometimes almost drive him to the point of suicide. As Ilse Graham reports,

> Karl's higher promptings, his fidelity and his rectitude, have indeed been displaced by the upsurge of excessive instinctual drives. But so far from ceasing to function without a proper domain of their own, these moral impulses attach themselves to his anarchic instincts, surreptitiously reinforcing them until their tyranny becomes absolute and untenable and the whole diseased system breaks down. (Graham 104)

The worst moment of torment Karl experiences is in the scene where he talks with Amalia disguised as the Graf from Mecklenburg (Robinson 123). In their dialogue, Amalia innocently presents a clear picture of Karl's noble past, a past which his predilection for adventure has obliterated from his mind but which, nevertheless, still exists. As they stand in front of the Old Moor's portrait, she comments: "A fine figure of a man" (108). The stark reality of his plight was like a thunder stroke and Karl momentarily loses his guard as seen in his response: "Father, father, forgive me!" (108) Further in the dialogue, she presents her angelic lover to the Count in reverie. It is noteworthy that this happens still against the background of his villainous present. He stands *ein Ungeheuer* before the very creature to whom he is still "like the light of heaven" (123). In this he sees how far he has gone and the impossibility of regaining the angelic nature again. This harsh reality towers above whatever justifications his "intentions" could offer for his villainous adventures and can never be obliterated.

This tormenting voice of evil is more manifest on the side of Franz because, as pointed out earlier, his resolve to do evil was calculated and launched with a determination to leave no room for conscience and reflections. Therefore, the evils kept accumulating until the time when

Franz lacked the power to do more evil. The tormenting voice of evil is ushered in by the discovery of the true identity of the "Count from Mecklenburg." Franz is convinced: "It is Karl! Yes! all his features spring to life once more—It is he! Despite his disguise—it is he! Death and damnation" (110). We should note that from this point on, Franz progresses no further on his course, but keeps going down until destruction swallows him up. Franz' torment was made more prominent in this case because it came at a stage of his enterprise when he could look back and almost declare "mission accomplie." He laments: "Was it for this that I sacrificed my nights—levelled rocks and filled in yawning chasms—rebelled against every instinct of humanity, all for this giddy vagrant to come blundering through my cunningest coils" (110). Franz in his panic tries to intimidate Daniel into blind loyalty, which will make him fit for use against the unveiled enemy. However, in the reference to "scales falling out of the eyes," we see the seed of his torment. He reveled all the time in the thought that Karl was gone and gone forever and that he was now the only heir to the family and practically in control. The scene played out before him in the castle and the recognition of the Count for who he is, exposes his self-delusion, makes him realize that he had been fooling himself all along. His own genius of evil turns around now to play games on him. "Will you deny it? What plots have you been hatching to get me out of the way? It's true, isn't it? You're going to strangle me in my sleep? Cut my throat when you are shaving me? Put poison in my wine or my chocolate?...Send me to eternal rest with my soup?...I know everything!" (111) The unveiling of the arch-enemy begins to provoke imaginations of "punitive justice"—punishment and vengeance—which Franz however, in the same brazen attitude of defiance, tries to neutralize by ordering the liquidation of the agent—the Count. Again, he displays that same egoistic self-delusion which assures him of "effective" authority as the "new master." His comment, "[y]our health then, sir count! It looks very much as though tomorrow you will be eating your hangman's breakfast!" (115), shows that he reposes an insurable confidence on Daniel's reluctant promise to send the Count to the land of the dead. Franz fails to read the handwriting on the wall.

The climax of Franz' torture came from the dream he had of the judgment day in which he saw himself cast away (Robinson 140-143). In the circumstances of this reality, all his well-tutored anti-religious principles, logic and arguments desert him, he starts to struggle to reinforce these beliefs, which formed the main basis of his resolve to follow evil without reckoning with the likely consequences.

> Peasant's wisdom, peasant's fear!—No one has yet discovered whether the past is not past, or whether there is an eye watching beyond the stars—h'm! Who prompted me to such thoughts? Is there an Avenger there beyond the stars?—No, no! Yes, yes! I hear a fearful hissing about me: there is a Judge beyond the stars! To go this very night to face the Avenger beyond the stars! No, I say!—a miserable corner where your cowardice seeks to hide—empty, desolate it is beyond the stars, and none to hear you—but if there should be something more? No, no, there is not! I command it not to be!—but if it were? Woe to you if all has been accounted! if it should be counted up before you this very night!—why do my bones shiver?—To die!—why does the word catch my throat so? To answer for myself to the Avenger beyond the stars..." (143)

The torment is further amplified and accelerated by the blunt accusations and pronouncements of judgment by the Pastor. Franz, who had probably always believed his deeds to have escaped the eyes of men, is made to know that all the while, he had been playing the "idiot safety game,"[2] when the Pastor tells him, on his request, the two greatest sins: "Patricide, the one is called and fratricide the other" (147). He is made to realize that for all these deeds, he is going to pay dearly. The torment of evil displays on the platform of conscience, which, as evident in this play, must "resurrect" somewhere as the power of evil ebbs away, to play another role, that of unmitigated condemnation foreshadowing a fate of irredeemable damnation. Pastor Moser refers to the conscience at this stage as "a tribunal within" "a fearful neighbor." He explains:

> [A] tribunal within, that your sceptical speculations will not be able to silence, will then awake, and sit in judgement upon you. But it will be an awakening as of one buried alive in the bowels of the churchyard, it will be a reluctant stirring—like that of the suicide who repents after the fatal stroke, it will be a flash of lightening that illuminates the midnight of your life, it will be a revelation. (146)

The visions of judgment which the "resurrected" conscience plays on the consciousness of the evil doer, ushers in the impending reality of "punitive justice." Talking of Franz, Graham states:

> It is then, close to death, that his outraged instincts reassert themselves, holding up before him apocalyptic visions of the

last judgement born of all the 'verworenen Schauer des Gewissens', visions in which he is held answerable for his disbelief and the actions springing from his disbelief. (Graham 107).

Evil and "Punitive Justice"

The terminal point of evil, as has already been pointed out, is "punitive justice." This is the point at which every man reaps what he has sown. The power of evil camouflages this reality from the conscious with the result that the chances of self-evaluation and self-check is almost impossible or ineffective. The fact of it is that while this is going on, "punitive justice" is blossoming to its full capacity. Once the villain crosses the threshold of safety, the power of evil begins to dissipate and the grip begins to loosen, allowing for the "resurrection" of conscience for the torment of evil, the forerunner of "punitive justice," to begin.

In the case of Karl, because the interludes of sober reflection did not allow the power of evil to choke his conscience, elements of "punitive justice" dotted the course of his activities right from inception, though only within the psychic realm. The actual "punitive justice" sets in from the point that he is at the castle and discovers the truth of his plight. The fact is that his exile and his continued "riotous living" (Garland, *Oxford Companion* 696) created the opportunity for his brother to strike the deadly blow, exploiting the first step he took to return to the fold of safety and sanity of nobility. "*A villain's trickery*! A robber, a murderer, through a villain's trickery! [...] my letter forged, intercepted" (119-120). In the context of his remark, "the prisoner had forgotten the light, but the dream of freedom flashed past him like the lightening in the night that leaves darker behind" (107), his first real punishment emerges in the realization of what he had lost. The cyst of oblivion created by the bravado of gangsterism and brigandism has been dissipated and the realities of his "infected" life begin to unfold, offering him no chances to effect any "disinfecting." Kosinsky had earlier said to Karl, "But why do I tell you this? it can only fall on deaf ears—you have never loved, have never been loved" (104). This was the very statement that started him, prompting his evacuation of the band to Franconia, his home region. Graham comments: "Yet, having been reminded of what he has lost, he decides to return to his home: not indeed to regain what he has forfeited, but in order to know the better what it is" (105). He recognizes his hopelessness and helplessness before this reality and exclaims, "so not for me the joy of love! so, for me love a torment! it is retribution!" (155).

The principal "punitive justice" in the account of Karl is in his repentance and subsequent surrender as the forfeiture for the restoration

of the law, which he had fought so much to destroy. He laments:

> Oh, fool that I was, to suppose that I could make the world a fairer place through terror, and uphold the cause of justice through lawlessness...But still something remains that can reconcile me to the laws against which I have offended, and restore the order which I have violated. They must have a sacrifice—a sacrifice that will make manifest their invulnerable majesty to all mankind—and I myself shall be the victim. For them I must surely die. (159)

On the part of Franz, "punitive justice" was also progressive, and, like in Karl's case, starting with psychological anguish. The impression of "punitive justice" is registered at the point when he, on recognizing the visiting Count for who he really was, discovers that he had not after all accomplished his task. "Have I not already waded up to the ears in mortal sin?—it would be folly to swim back when the shore lies so far behind me" (110). He recognizes the 50/50 chances of failure and success. That could be why the shore lies so far behind him with the shore before him uncertain. However, more tormenting is the realization again, that his courtiers, who he believed to be loyal to him and on his side, have been having a cordial interaction with the Count. "Have they not already stirred him up against me too! He looks like a man with a secret" (110). The encounter with the Pastor brings with it a retributive torture that sends Franz into a fit of rage: "May the thunder strike you dumb. Lying spirit! I will tear out your accursed tongue by the roots!" (147).

Mental anguish is just an adumbration of "punitive justice." Franz, because of his reprobate apostasy, did not recognize his evil deeds not to talk of accepting them. So he could not escape the terminal "punitive justice." Franz committed suicide. By this act, he intended to escape the punishment for his evil deeds. The irony of this is that instead, he effected the transition, which will take him to the place where the ultimate "punitive justice"—eternal damnation—could be waiting for him.

Conclusion

The two brothers—Karl and Franz—have completed the circus of evil and have landed on the platform of judgment, the terminal point of the course of evil. Both of them had a common experience in that they were both victims of the powers of evil irrespective of the ways by which they prosecuted their enterprise. The only difference is that, Franz, as a result of his well-tutored reprobate apostasy, did not recognize the

consequences of his deeds, the "content" of the "punitive justice" awaiting him. He was dragged to the place of punishment by the irresistible power of "punitive justice." On the other hand, Karl, who by reason of the flood of instinct became an agent of evil, made a U-turn when the veil that eclipsed his reason was torn by the revelations he had at the castle. By this, the irresistible desire for restitution through punishment subsumed the irresistible power of "punitive justice." He walked to the place of punishment. Franz by committing suicide escaped punishment among the living, but if the vision he saw of eternal damnation is anything to go by, eternal punishment awaits him. On the other hand, Karl's fate seems to suggest to us that, no matter the extent to which we are involved in evil doing, if we acknowledge our deeds as evil and show genuine remorse for them, we could be delivered from the power of evil and saved the fate of eternal damnation, even when we do not escape punishment among the living.

The principal import of this study is that evil, in most cases, is a product of the work of nature in combination with the work of humanity. Judging from the fate of Karl and Franz, one could deduce that evil, no matter who does it, at what level, in what magnitude and on what basis, is evil and its consequences must manifest themselves in one way or the other when the time is ripe. And when the consequences of evil come, they manifest themselves as a different kind of evil on an individual, an institution or a society. Thus, a chain of evil is triggered, which could lead to derailment. Whatever is destroyed as evil thrives cannot be restored, whatever is lost to the ravage of evil is lost forever.

Taking the play back to the society of its origin, we see how the evils perpetrated by the privileged class, as revealed in the activities of Franz, seen and heard, bred the kind of epidemic evil that threatened the very existence of the same society. Franz, the natural sadist, who had the power to sear his conscience to shut of any argument about good and bad, right and wrong, just and unjust, wicked and kind, a symbol of the privileged class, who by reason of his status in the society, was not under threat of any law, even though he was in evil, has to submit to the force of the "punitive justice" when the time came, even a more severe punishment—eternal damnation. Karl, "the crusader of justice for the emancipation of the down trodden," in spite of all his rationalization to justify his atrocities against the society, had to submit himself to the will of "punitive justice" for a due recompense, however, with a chance of escaping eternal punishment. The fate shared by these two men underwrites the fact that the course of evil leads to destruction and no one does evil and gets by irrespective of his socio-political status.

Notes

[1] See Gottfried August Bürger's poem "Der Bauer an seinen durchlauchtigen Tyrannen."

[2] The idiot buries its head under the earth when it is being attacked and believes that as it does not see the predator, the predator does not see it also.

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Munch's Madonna *as Mythical Sign*

Corina Lacatus

> *Speaking and seeing at the same time, although it is not the same thing, although we do not speak of what we see, or see that of which we speak.* (Deleuze 67)

In his book *Mythologies*, Roland Barthes argues, "Myth is a mode of signification, is a form" (110). Any critical attempt to understand or to conceive of painting or photography as myth, would thus deal with language and images no longer as mere forms, but rather with signification. Therefore, the analysis of a painting would not be restricted to a mere descriptive enumeration of its compositional elements, but it would identify the technique employed and its visual results in their interaction. Moreover, it would conceive of its formal syntax as a screen behind which the meaning of the painting lies. In Levi-Strauss' book, *The Savage Mind*, a definition of myth is formulated as being the space of signification that lies "half-way between percepts and concepts, in which mythology comes about" (18). This intermediary element between image and content is thought of by the French anthropologist as a linguistic sign.

According to Saussure's definition, a sign is a linguistic unity of meaning, formed of two interrelated elements—the signifier and the signified. When written, the word-sign WOMAN, for example, is composed of the signifier, which is the sound of the word WOMAN (the succession of phonemes) and the graphical form of it. The second half of the sign, the signified, is the concept of WOMAN, the idea which we associate mentally with the word WOMAN.

Roland Barthes elaborates on the relationship of signification within the visual sign in the realm of the myth. According to Barthes, signification is the relationship within the sign, between the signifier and the signified, operating towards a kind of opening of the former. A new sign is created precisely in this space of significance within a sign. Therefore, myth is thought of not as a simple sign, but rather as a *second-order semiological system.* In the process of signification, the signifier itself becomes a sign (Figure I).

In his book *Discours, Figure,* Jean-François Lyotard discusses the distance between signified and signifier in terms of negation, as "en chiasme périlleux," intervening between nature and language (painting in our case). This particular type of relationship between nature and

Figure I

language occurs at the moment when the word gains *voluminosity* and rids itself of its syntax, to the effect of conceding its polysemy to "l'espace qui nous relie au monde" (292). According to Lyotard, the case of painting in particular illustrates perfectly this duality of the negating relationship of signification intrinsic to the sign.

Continuing the discussion of the mythical sign, Barthes affirms that: "Mythical speech is made of a material which has already been worked on so as to make it suitable for communication: it is because all the materials of myth (whether pictorial or written) presuppose a signifying consciousness that one can reason about them while discounting their substance" (110). In his diagram of the mythical sign redrawn previously, the observers are placed in the realm of the signified; their presence is vital to the process of signification, as they are the ones for which the paintings are created: They are the ones assigning meaning to them.

In *Myth and Reality*, Mircea Eliade thinks of myth as a relationship between the *world* and the *sacred*. By *sacred*, Eliade does not necessarily imply the *religious* as thought of by Christianity, but rather the equivalent of the universal signified, in which Barthes inscribes the mythical sign. According to Eliade, the myth becomes "an account of a *creation*," and it "describes the various and sometimes dramatic breakthroughs of the sacred (or the *supernatural*) into the World" (6). It is this sudden breakthrough of the sacred that really *establishes* the World and makes it what it is today. Furthermore, it is as a result of the intervention of the *supernatural beings* that man himself is what he is today, a mortal, sexed, and cultural being" (6). Myths are thus stories of creation in general—they are created by man in order to understand his own creation. According to Eliade, the universal signified is of a higher

order than *nature*, and *nature* itself is inscribed into the meaning of the Sacred.

Painting as mythical sign tells the story of its own creation. The nature of modern painting as mythical sign appears more clearly as such when compared with the historically remote bodily painting of the *primitive* societies. Primitive man does not think of the act of painting his own body as a rational act of creation: he is not the creator of a figurative world, copying an object from his surrounding reality or trying to build an imaginary construct of his object of desire. The function of the body is the one of direct signification, of inscribing itself in a superior order of things, whose harmony the human body needs to be a part of.

In modern painting, this process is mediated. Above all, the act of painting is no longer anonymous, as it is the artist who performs the conscious act of filtering reality through his own eyes and who builds a new fictional world. Compared to primitive decoration of the human body, this *fantasme* represents a more limited experience of the real, a more imperfect and mediated mode of signifying of the universal signified: "Celle-ci se réfère à une phénoménologie, celle-là à une archéologie. C'est l'acte même que par la première est inconscient du soi et s'oublie dans la fascination naïve, naturelle de l'objet qu'il vise" (Lyotard 28-29).

Ever since the Impressionists, painting has told the story of its being mere signifier, whose signified cannot be fully understood; in other words, painting tells the story of its incompleteness and imperfection as a signifier of too vast a signified: "discourse is annihilated in its reality by entering into the order of the signifier" (Deleuze 89). Painting as myth tells the story of what is not seen and what may not be seen and therefore not to be grasped. It does this by opening and at the same time negating the space on the canvas.

In his study on painting, *Discourse, Figure*, Lyotard differentiates between two ways of representing reality, *the primitive and the modern*, on the basis of negation. Negation governs painting's consciousness of its own fundamentally imperfect figuration of the universal on the surface of the canvas. Lyotard's formulation of negation provides a way to conceive of modern painting as a form of myth, a conceptualization or naming of the transgression between the linguistic/symbolic nature of the orally transmitted myth and its expression as pictorial form.

Lyotard's negation can be illustrated by painting from the late 19th century and the entire 20th century; negation becomes the denomination of signification, thought of as the distance imminent to the constitution of a painting: "Il y a une négation impliquée dans le visible,

Edvard Munch. *Madonna*. 1893-94.
Oil on Canvas. 90 x 6.85 cm
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The Munch-Ellingsen Group/
Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York

la distance, l'espacement constitutif de l'espace, négation éprouvée dans la variabilité" (27).

The domain of negation in painting is manifest on the canvas. The colors, the lines, the intermingling or succession of them, the form they create and its contour, the light and its absence, the geometry of composition and elements of the real which are not enclosed in it, all of these constitute the signifier of the visual myth; they open to the gaze a space of meaning which is not defined and graspable by means of conscious, symbolic actualization, but it is rather a distance in which the gaze can think of itself as the process of signification, dealing with painting as negation. With the help of its own technical constituents, painting thinks of its own origins in a space of symbolic indeterminacy and imaginary prominence.

The comprehension of this space of infinite significance lies beyond the specificity of words or forms and appeals not to human rationality: "(...) pictures, to be sure, are more imperative than writing, they impose meaning at one stroke, without analyzing or diluting it" (Barthes 110).

In order to illustrate this permanent oscillation of the gaze when contemplating, between the visible space and the one of the signified (the one off-screen space), I will try to describe my own process of looking at two paintings by the Norwegian painter, Edvard Munch. The analysis is, no matter how personal, forced upon me by the paintings themselves, by their way of telling their own story, by the way they raise the question of significance and lead the eye towards a more profound space, the one of the mythical signified.

Madonna (Figure II) and *Loving Woman* are two variations on the same theme of the woman, painted by Munch in 1896, when the artistic atmosphere was anticipating what the fin-de-siècle would bring about: technical experimentation, infusion of the artist's own life experience (Expressionism), defragmentation of the real (Cubism), formal simplification and chromatic reduction to one dominant color (French Synthétisme), to name a few.

If one contemplates the signifier of the first painting, one observes the canvas, the brushwork and the colors, all of which are 'on-screen' elements. The oil paint, as opposed to watercolor, gives the portrait an intense and somewhat solid consistency, while the brushwork traces great curved lines, giving the composition fluidity and creating a sensation of continuous movement (similar to that of dancing). The almost complete absence of homogeneous color surfaces gives the composition an immanent movement. *Madonna* or *Loving Woman* is a painting of nuances in which shades of blue, red and light yellow are blended and suffused under the dominance of black, formally simplifying the figure of the woman. The thematic choice is not contingent either – the portrayed figure is a woman, and the symbolism of the feminine figure gives the formal structure ambiguity and supports the general fluidity of the composition in the sense in which Paul Klee expressed it:

> Le genèse en tant que mouvement formel constitue l'essentiel de l'oeuvre. Au début le motif, insertion de l'énergie, sperme. Œuvres en tant que génération de la forme en sens matériel: originellement féminines. Œuvres en tant que sperme déterminant la forme: originellement masculines. (Lyotard 229)

The choice of the motif directs the eye of the observer towards a sexual interpretation, which is only one of the possible interpretations of the signifier.

The portrait is a nude, but not a full-body one; the upper section of the body is accentuated—her prominent breast and stomach and they may suggest, in the realm of the signified, fertility. At the same time, the narrowness of her waist, compared to the breadth of her shoulders, illustrates bodily adolescence, when fertility is still only a possibility. Munch's portrait, however, presents the feminine figure as a mere woman, a female individual, with narrow waist and broad shoulders who, prey of her own dancing *juissance*, hides her eyes from the viewer's gaze.

Yet another symbol of fertility may be the navel. If this metaphorical image of the navel can be thought of as the formal *punctum*,[2] which opens a reading of the painting as an imaginary representation of

the female unconscious and which operates in a similar way to the symbolic actualization of a dream. In a footnote to his analysis of *Irma's Dream,* Sigmund Freud affirms that, "[the] navel is a point of contact with the unknown" (Freud 178). Another element on-screen is the light, which seems to originate in the body of the woman. As her body itself is not inscribed into a well-defined contour, the light makes her figure stand out from the formless background. Her body seems to emanate light. This lack of an exterior light source appears almost as a formal refusal of the painting to allow the gaze of the observer to place the whole image of the woman painted in a real, familiar space.

The hands of the *loving woman* are barely visible and seem to perform the mere structural function of inscribing the whole nude into the continuous dancing movement of the composition. Their significance off-screen could be one of depriving the painted woman of touching, of sensorial pleasure. Undoubtedly the most striking detail on-screen is the halo around her head. It can be thought of as the key element of the signifier, which, together with the title, places the meaning of the painting into the realm of the religious. She is not the Madonna on Byzantine icons, but she is a Madonna, whose human condition prevails over her sacredness—she is primarily a woman.

The second reproduction bearing the same double title is a lithographic variation on the same theme, *Madonna* or *Loving Woman.* On its surface the traces of the pencil are evident, though covered with black paint. If we compare the consistency of the composition in both portraits, the dynamic movement of the latter one is more concrete and less fluid.

An analysis of the changes in composition shows that certain body parts that were on-screen in the painting are off-screen in the lithograph. The woman's hands are completely hidden, the prominence of both her breast and her stomach now diffused. The symbols of fertility in the painting have lost their power of significance in the signifier of the lithograph.

Nevertheless, new objects are brought to the surface of the canvas —Munch paints a frame around the portrait, in which sperm floats. The body's fluid movement in the painting is now assigned explicit sexual significance. The woman's psychological state of self-contemplation can now be thought of as a state of Lacanian *jouissance.*

The halo is still present, but its primary visual significance is diminished and symbolically transferred to the image of the stillborn baby. Even though the stillborn baby is placed somewhat marginally in the composition, its symbolic meaning is death. Munch's *Madonna* and her stillborn baby are figures of the signified, which lead the interpretation

towards a re-naming of the Sacred as Death, or perhaps inscribe death into the order of the universal signified.

According to Lyotard, the distance or the intervening arbitrariness—the negation at work between the signifier of modern painting and the signified—is brought about by desire. Moreover, the thematic choice of portraying a woman is not contingent. A woman on the surface of the canvas becomes the object of desire of both the author and the onlooker. She is given form and individual volume, but never definite contour, full bodily function or a *real* human existence. She is a mere form, the illusion of an indeterminate real woman, but she personifies *the* woman as category. In Munch's *Madonna,* the space of the signified is to be thought of as that of woman as category, and its immanent negation is found precisely in this extension of the formal, pictorial image of an individual woman into that of woman as universal.

The existence of two variations of the same painting can also be conceived of as pictorial validation of infinite signification. Compositional differences between the painting and the lithograph bring about changes only in the space of the signifier and of that accessible to the gaze of the onlooker. The images created on the surface of the canvas have a symbolic immanent negativity and a certain awareness of their impotence of total signification. Nonetheless, they have "le pouvoir d'élargir le [leurs] signifié aux dimension d'un monde: comme si l'évoqué était une forme qui porte son fond avec elle" (Lyotard 291).

She is not the Madonna of Byzantine icons, but she is a Madonna whose human condition prevails over her sacrality—she is primarily a worshipped *woman*. Love, death, desire, self-contemplation, and religious ecstatic dance all create an on-screen space of expressionist decadence, whose off-screen significance is so powerful and extensive that it cannot be but a space of multiple interpretations, of manifold meaning, and of infinite semiosis. Painting is a sign whose signified is universal, that is mythical, sacred or pure negation.

Notes

[1] The use of *symbolic* and *imaginary* is based on the Lacanian understanding of them. The imaginary is a pre-linguistic space, illustrated by the mirror-stage in the evolution of the self. The symbolic is the realm of the conscious, rationalization through speech.

[2] *Punctum*, as defined by Roland Barthes in *Camera Lucida*, is the formal element of a photograph which captures the eye and justifies the viewer's attraction for a certain photograph, 43-47.

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Tactical Media: Re-interpreting VALIE EXPORT's Tapp und Tastkino *(1968–1971) as a Model of Communication in Expanded Cinema*

Gloria Sutton

While contemporary Austrian multimedia artist VALIE EXPORT's "street action" *Tapp und Tastkino* ("touch cinema") is widely recognized as an important early contribution to the fields of Feminist and Performance Art, there has been little critical attention given to its impact on redefining the terms of Expanded Cinema developing simultaneously in the US and Europe during the late 1960s and early 1970s. This paper contends that by prioritizing audience interaction as the subject of the work itself, *Tapp und Tastkino* complicated conventional notions of artistic collaboration and audience reception. No longer constrained by the formal viewing strategies of film, theater, or visual art, VALIE EXPORT more specifically sought to foreground the viewer's multi-sensory cinematic experience while overtly politicizing the actions that condition the very act of looking and being looked at in both the private and public spheres.

This article adds historical and formal specificity to the various under-examined aspects of the project by providing a chronology and description of the work's various permutations between its conception in 1968 and its subsequent acquisition by Vienna's Generali Foundation in the late 1990s. *Tapp und Tastkino's* critical and public reception as a live event enacted on the streets of major European cities between 1968 and 1971 is juxtaposed against its current form as a historical discourse object, which provides an alternate model of artistic exchange and reception for contemporary art. Already by the 1950s, the archetype of the lone, heroic artist transforming raw materials into unique objects of desire was no longer the paragon of fine art production. Through *Tapp und Tastkino*, VALIE EXPORT pressured the subsequent industrial-based model of art production that dominated the 1960s in which the artist operated as a one-way distribution channel outputting work that addressed an anonymous mass audience.[1] Even with its crude construction and awkward stagings, *Tapp und Tastkino* clearly redirected the focus in art away from discrete modes of production toward an emphasis on two-way communication between the artist and a discrete, collective audience.

Figure 1: Diagram of *Tapp und Tastkino* VALIE EXPORT
Reproduced in *Split Reality: VALIE EXPORT*. exh. cat. Vienna: Museum moderner Kunst Stiftung Ludwig Wien, 1997.

The scene under consideration takes place on 13 November 1968 in the Munich Marktplatz, a traditional open square of slate and poured concrete worn smooth from being trampled Monday through Friday by thousands of feet. Secretaries, accountants, and middle management all followed their well-worn routes hustling toward their regular cafes to intermittently sip black coffee and take drags off cigarettes while scanning the headlines of their favorite dailies. The booming, metallic chimes emanating from the clock tower looming overhead monitored and controlled their movements. At half past one they scurried along at a pace set by knowing exactly how many strides, turns, and pauses it takes to reach their respective offices within their allotted midday break. But on that November afternoon these office workers would run into an ungainly crowd of salespeople, receptionists, students, retirees and construction workers and together they unwittingly formed a spontaneous audience who experienced a breakthrough work of art that would later become canonized within the history of twentieth-century art.

In order to get to the source of the commotion that cold Wednesday afternoon, they would have had to strain to find a vantage point to see through the dense pack of knit hats and thick wool coats that collected around two figures who took center stage on the Marktplatz that day. Standing on the tops of their toes, they would have fixated their attention on a striking woman wearing a rigid Styrofoam box over her bare chest and a man circling her with a bull horn shouting above the din of the quickly gathering crowd, inviting the perplexed onlookers to step in closer and enter into this new type of cinema in order to have a feel. Craning further and pressing up against the backs of the men standing in front, they would have focused on the woman's heavily made-up eyes

which gazed straight ahead into the face of a random man from the crowd standing directly in front of her pressing his cold hands through the flimsy curtains that covered the front of the box and rested them against her breasts. This event was called *Tapp und Tastkino*, and it was a provocative experiment by VALIE EXPORT to move the private act of visually consuming women's bodies from the darkened spaces of the cinema into the realm of public lived space.

An analysis of any project, film or performance by VALIE EXPORT has to start with an explanation of her most famous artwork: her name. The artist's adoption of the logo *VALIE EXPORT* has been a source of intrigue and speculation within art history even though there is little in the way of sustained scholarship in the US devoted to this artist's extensive body of work, which spans from the early 1960s to the present. More importantly, the explanation of how this name materialized functions as a creation myth and provides an ontological source for the artist's feminist viewing strategies, which underlie *Tapp und Tastkino* and more often than not, for those who write about her work. Born in Linz as Waltraud Lehner, she relocated to Vienna in 1967 at the age of 27 and changed her name to VALIE EXPORT insisting on the uppercase as a way to distinguish herself within the burgeoning Viennese art world. The new title symbolically negated the artist's personage and underscored her early focus on constructions of identity through language. Waltraud was condensed into its diminutive form, Walie, and the *W* morphed into a *V* replicating the German pronunciation of the letter. She appropriated the tagline *Export* from a brand of popular of cigarettes and VALIE EXPORT became the trademark by which she has signed and circulated her work from 1968 to the present.

Within a US context, EXPORT's provocative artistic contributions are heralded within the discourse on Performance and Feminist Art, but her significant experiments and impact on the field of media art have gone largely unrecognized outside of Europe.[2] The wide scope of her artistic practice also contributes to the lack of coverage in the US since so much of art history is delineated according to strict notions of medium specificity, and EXPORT's work ranges from photographic montages, multimedia installations, feature-length films, and performances, which all manage to elude singular categorization. Moreover, EXPORT's artistic genealogy is embedded within a diverse set of experimental practices associated with the neo-avant-garde, primarily Happenings and Fluxus, which took on a variety of forms simultaneously in the US and Europe after 1945. The projects, performances, events and exhibitions associated with Fluxus and Happenings were neither centralized nor designated art movements, but

pressured the conceptual limitations of conventional exhibitions and art practices.

Although the types of projects produced under the rubric of Fluxus or Happenings were driven by a diverse range of personalities working in dispersed locales, they shared several key tenets which are underscored in EXPORT's own work: attention to everyday or banal materials, the use of random selection, an inclination for spontaneous actions, the elimination of categories and formal boundaries between media, and an anti-authoritarian position toward social and political issues.[3] EXPORT's various aesthetic strategies are framed by her consistent critical engagement with the dominant cultural apparatus—from models of exhibition and connoisseurship to pedagogy and archiving. A more localized influence on EXPORT's artistic formation was the controversial work associated with *Wiener Aktionisten*. While EXPORT was never actually a member of this group of Vienna-based artists, she was highly aware of their performances and they helped to define— even out of contrast—her own actions and art practice. The *Wiener Aktionisten* developed in response to a complex set of social and political variables influencing cultural production during this period in Europe including Viennese religious repression, Freudian psychoanalysis, Artaud's "theater of cruelty," linguistic philosophy and experimental poetry which were incorporated into the group's extreme, violent and often harrowing performances (Mueller xviii). In addition, Austria itself occupied a uniquely volatile psychological state during the post-war period due to its identification as both victim and aggressor during the war, which influenced the subjects and forms that Viennese artists were attempting to contend with. More specifically, artists associated with *Wiener Aktionisten* were invested in locating the "real," authentic experience over the mimetic in art, which underscored their sensationalistic, masochistic, and ritualistic performances.

What connected EXPORT to *Wiener Aktionisten* was her investment in overtly challenging social, sexual, and cultural conventions and her predilection for using the human body as the principal medium for her work. However, what distinguished her work from *Wiener Aktionisten* as well as her American contemporaries was not only her consistent deployment of media such as television, film and video, but her critical reflection on the power relations inherently bound up in technology and communication systems and her attempts to challenge the conventional viewing paradigms established for art and cinema. An early stated goal of EXPORT's was to "activate the public" by disrupting the seamlessness of the filmic apparatus.[4] The complex themes reflected in this goal—liberation, questioning public vs. private and expanding

the conception of cinema—has consistently pervaded much of her work whether it be film, performance, or photo-based.

In *Tapp und Tastkino*, usually translated into English as "touch cinema"[5] and conceived of in 1968, EXPORT probes issues of media reception and presages the discourse that developed into the focus of study for feminist film theory simultaneously developing in the US and Europe during the 1970s. As an *Aktion* or "historical performance," the meaning and significance of *Tapp und Tastkino* has to be conveyed through other media, objects, or testimonials. Rather than interpreting this fact as a type of loss or distance from the original moment or experience, it registers a key paradigmatic shift in post-war art production. The expansion of the field of meaning around an artwork from its original moment to its various permutations and ephemera signaled a radical break from the industrial model in which artists are solely invested in producing singular objects for collection and preservation toward a telecommunications model of exchange emphasizing feedback and participation. In order to engage in a critical examination of the work, *Tapp und Tastkino* must be read simultaneously as a filmic apparatus, a performance as well as a collection of sketches and photographic material documenting various aspects of the piece. Through the course of this paper, I argue that in addition to recognizing the work as a performance it registers also on the level of discourse and addresses three separate subjects: the natural body, the social body and the historical body. Furthermore, by reading *Tapp und Tastkino* as a form of tactile communication, rather than performance, the

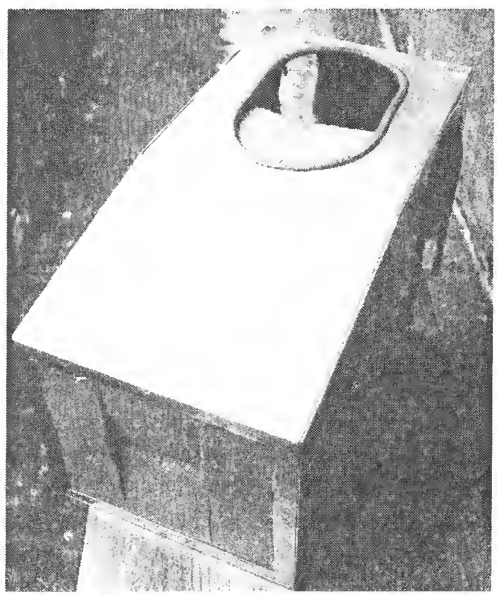

Figure II: *Tapp und Tastkino* metal "theater" Reproduced in Roswitha Mueller, *VALIE EXPORT: Fragments of the Imagination.* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995)

Figure III: *Tapp und Tastkino,* Expanded Cinema,1968
Photo: Werner Schulz, Munich
Archive Valie Export, Collection of Generali Foundation, Vienna
Reproduced in Roswitha Mueller, *VALIE EXPORT: Fragments of the Imagination.*
(Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995)

work suggests an alternate economy of exchange.

An initial complication that *Tapp und Tastkino* makes evident is that the value of the artwork no longer simply resides with the material objects themselves. Although the Generali Foundation—the philanthropic division of the Generali Corporation, a large European insurance interest headquartered in Vienna—acquired the project, it really purchased the "rights" to reproduce or re-enact the work. This is in addition to receiving EXPORT's drawings and the documentary photos and texts produced in 1968. Reflecting the institutional indeterminacy of much of performance and multimedia work to be collected as fine art, *Tapp und Tastkino* is housed in the Foundation's archives rather than in its object-based collection. However, the Foundation focuses on the physicality of the work as evidenced in its catalogue description:

> *Tapp und Tastkino*
> Expanded cinema, mini (handheld) theater
> 44cm x 53cm x 13cm
> 4 photographs, magazines and Xeroxes[6]

There is not a singular comprehensive account of the work's construction or chronology and published reviews and references to the piece mention different materials and settings confirming the fact that contrary to how the work is most commonly interpreted, *Tapp und Tastkino*

was not a singular event or a serial staging of the same performance. Instead it took on various forms and was enacted in several different locations throughout Europe spanning the years 1968 to 1971. While each event had distinct differences due to the spontaneous reactions of the crowds and the roles played by EXPORT, a common condition was the fact that the spectators were not necessarily invited for a particular event, but were confronted with the action in their everyday context. Moreover, while most of the performances maintained a formal stage-like setting in material and presentation, all of the actions tried to dispense with the traditional theater/stage complex and instead utilized a public or commercial arena, and a simple, direct means of expression that alarmed, agitated, titillated as well as amused. Earlier titles for the piece published in various reviews included: *1/5 minute*, *ein tastfilm*, *mini-leinwand ohne projection*, *street film*, *mobile film*, *true women's film*, *body action*, and *social action*.

In EXPORT's notes for the construction of the *Tapp und Tastkino* apparatus, the traditional theater screen and film was literally and symbolically replaced with the body subverting the privileging of vision over touch as means of communication. Or in her words: "die taktile Rezeption steht gegen den Betrug des Voyeurismus" (258). This intention is illustrated by EXPORT in a coarse diagram that works to define the terms of the project by superimposing a photo of a woman's breasts in the place of the central cinematic screen (see Fig. I). To enact this concept, EXPORT strapped a mini-movie theater, fabricated out of plastic, metal or cardboard, over her bare chest and brought the private act of watching into the public realm of touching.

The awkward, box-like apparatus had two large armholes on both sides and a neck hole at the top with the weight of the box resting on the wearer's shoulders (see Fig. II). The exact dimensions of the apparatus varied, but generally it started below the wearer's chin and throat and covered the entire torso. The *Tapp und Tastkino* was worn so that the theater's two slits or openings, which where covered with cloth curtains or foam material, faced outward. The viewer would part the curtains with his fingers and enter into the theater space with his hands and arms, forcing him to experience the "film" through touch rather than sight. Simultaneously, by reaching in through the curtain, the distance separating the viewer's and the wearer's faces would diminish. Intimacy was generated not only through the obvious touching and assumed groping of the wearer's chest, but also through an intense level of eye contact established between the two during this process as evidenced in the most well-known image from the piece (see Fig. III). The duration of the "screening" seems to have varied from just a few seconds, to 12 seconds,

to five minutes. In all accounts, the length of the "visit" was pre-determined by the wearer, and the viewers all seemed to have abided by the set rules of engagement.

The first performance of *Tapp und Tastkino* was at the 2nd Viennese film festival on 11 November 1968. VALIE EXPORT was invited to screen her Expanded Cinema films and chose to show *Ping Pong*, an interactive film in which viewers hit a ball against the screen illuminated by the light of the projector, as well as *Tapp und Tastkino*. She constructed a cardboard version of the *Kino* herself for this event, underscoring her desire to directly equate actual female bodies with celluloid as being part of the filmic apparatus and social conventions of screening women's bodies. When her scheduled time slot arrived, EXPORT put on the box and climbed on stage, positioning herself between the central screen and the art crowd audience sitting in traditional theater-style rows. It is unclear what, if anything, EXPORT said, but several news reports mention the fact that G. Radanowicz, a young Swiss director, leapt from the audience, rushed the stage and attempted to pull the apparatus off VALIE EXPORT while kicking her and exclaiming, "seht her diesen Busen fürs Volk," an exact contradiction to EXPORT's stated intentions (Prammer 104).

From this point forward, the public reception of her work was marked by verbal and physical violence. There were sensationalistic headlines and press accounts that relay the fact that EXPORT received a "verbal lynching" by the critics who "laid her work on a funerary pyre" (Lamb-Faffelberger 123-24).[7] According to Margarete Lamb-Faffelberger's analysis of the mainstream news accounts from this period, EXPORT's work was misunderstood within the context of social intolerance and conservatism that subsumed Vienna during this time. A more directly legal reaction taken against EXPORT was that "street actions" were forbidden from taking place in Vienna from that point forward. In addition, documentation of this action would be entered as evidence against her when she was brought up on charges of pornography later in the 1970s (Lamb-Faffelberger 123-24).

Tapp und Tastkino's second public display was framed by the European meeting of the International Independent filmmakers group in Munich two days later on 13 November 1968. EXPORT again strapped on the *Tapp und Tastkino*, but this time eschewed a traditional stage setting for a public performance in front of an independent theater located in a busy commercial section of Munich's Marktplatz. The more widely circulated black and white images that have come to stand in or define Tapp und Tastkino were taken by Werner Schulz at this performance (see Fig. IV). In this version, EXPORT wore an apparatus constructed out of

Figure IV: *Tapp und Tastkino,* Expanded Cinema, 1968
Photo: Werner Schulz, Munich
Archive Valie Export, Collection of Generali Foundation, Vienna
Reproduced in Roswitha Mueller, *VALIE EXPORT: Fragments of the Imagination.*
(Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995)

Styrofoam and EXPORT's frequent collaborator, Peter Weibel, a Vienna-based video and filmmaker, used a megaphone to attract a crowd largely made up of men on their midday work break. Functioning as an announcer, Weibel pitched the sensory experience of this particular cinema to the crowds that gathered (Prammer 105). This version or edition of the performance became a focal point for many critics who placed Weibel in the position of control and interpreted his actions as that of a "pimp" trafficking VALIE EXPORT's sexualized body.[8] Only a select few details concerning this performance are published, but the roughhousing of the crowd destroyed the Styrofoam cinema and the police intervened, as they had done previously in Vienna.

A year later in 1969, a third version of the theater box was constructed. This time aluminum was used and the "front entrance" to the theater was constructed out of stiff foam in order to create more of a membrane rather than the curtain-effect of the earlier models. With the advent of a more durable theater, the project took on an increasingly mobile dimension and street performances occurred in Cologne, Essen

and London. In 1971, *Tapp und Tastkino* was performed in Amsterdam with artist Erika Mies wearing the theater and this time, EXPORT was the one who worked the crowd with a megaphone. This rotation of EXPORT's role in the piece, from the body in the box to the voice outside, emphasized her stated intention that the fundamental focus of the work was on transforming the female body as sexual object to fully addressed subject, not EXPORT's particular body or artist's bodies in general. In addition, this switching of roles underscores the fact that the project as a whole cannot be reduced to only one singular execution or performance to represent the entire piece. *Tapp und Tastkino* existed as a composite of multiple actions and events, over an indeterminate set of time. I would also insist that the discourse surrounding the project is also considered to be part of the work. This argument is supported by the Generali's inclusion of the photographic and published material as part of the overall work alongside the actual constructed theater apparatus as part of the work's formal checklist.

The project also set in motion EXPORT's critique of cinematic voyeurism that would become increasingly pressured a year later through another confrontational performance, *Genital Panic*, in which she moved through the rows of a darkened theater so that viewers had to address EXPORT's exposed pubic region while she carried a machine gun. This blunt critique of voyeurism is based on the reasoning that the spectator's interest is locked in through a promise of disclosing "the forbidden." According to film historian, Roswitha Mueller, in the majority of commercial films, revealing "the forbidden" revolves around exposing the body of women, specifically the breast and genital areas (Mueller 16). Within the *Tapp und Tastkino*, the conventional voyeuristic mode of watching is undercut by altering cinematic viewing conditions. Instead of taking cover in the anonymity provided by darkened theaters, EXPORT demanded that the spectator directly face the "real thing" out in the open, in the middle of the street, and most importantly, that the spectator be seen doing so in public.[9] A crucial element was the fact that the viewer was forced to confront the woman's gaze for the duration of the action.

According to EXPORT, within the *Tapp und Tastkino*

> the artist displays her own breasts freely and no longer follows social prescriptions or regulations, moving away from becoming a sexualized object made by man; the fact that everything happens in public, on the main shopping drag where the consumer can buy anything i.e. man or woman, this constitutes an undisguised infraction of the dominant social model. (EXPORT 258)

Through highly dramatic antics, EXPORT foregrounded the distinction between vision and physicality and inverted the equation that only a physical action can be violent. Closely examining the images from the Munich event, it is clear that it was EXPORT's own confrontational gaze that created the intense atmosphere and conveys her sense of control over the situation which prevented the crowd from reducing her statement into a mass spectacle, publicity stunt, or a scene of mob physical violence. In addition, by staging the action on an average weekday afternoon, in the most public of public spaces, EXPORT clearly intended to invert the designation of the home as being the realm of the private and feminine and the public as the site of discourse and debate. Through *Tapp und Tastkino*, any distinction between the two spheres was fundamentally collapsed within the confines of a flimsy piece of cardboard. Her argument was that "through a new organization of seeing through touching, new meanings in political and social terms can be realized collapsing the distinction between the private and public" (EXPORT 258). This reference to the theoretical, social and political position of women within the public sphere adds credence to the fact that *Tapp und Tastkino* was to engage on the level of discourse as well as action and that EXPORT's intent was to alter the political realities as well as the aesthetics of viewing women.

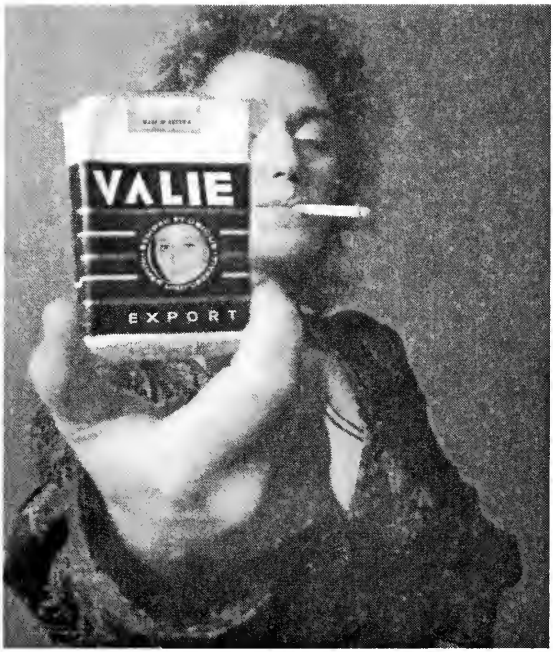

Figure V: *SmartEXPORT*
Gertraude Wolfschwenger
1968 – 1970
Reproduced in *VALIE EXPORT: Ob/De+Con(Struction)*.
exh. cat. Philadelphia: Moore College of Art and Design, 2000.

Mediating Tapp und Tastkino

Two stock political concerns of the 1960s, the breakdown between private and public spheres and the promotion of sexual liberation, are evident in the project, but EXPORT also considered *Tapp und Tastkino* to be what she referred to as a "true women's film—woman's first step from object to subject" (EXPORT 258). While her early projects with Peter Weibel, including *Tapp und Tastkino*, were not explicitly feminist in their conception, they began to reflect EXPORT's process of recognizing and legitimating a discursive female subject within an art context which earlier had regarded this same female subject only as a discrete, passive object. A work from the *Tapp und Tastkino* period is the 1968/1970 photographic "self-portrait" titled *SmartEXPORT* taken by Gertraud Wolfschwenger (see Fig. V). Reviewing this more widely circulated, grainy, black and white image helps demonstrate how VALIE EXPORT attempted to make the shift from object to subject by communicating as both signifier and sign. In the portrait, the artist is pictured in a casually confident pose: hand on hip, eyes closed, lit-cigarette fixed between her lips and holding out a package of cigarettes. The words spelling out VALIE EXPORT on the cigarette package signify the name of the artist, but the inclusion of a smaller circular portrait of the artist's face on the package itself stands in for a logo or trademark—so that VALIE EXPORT also functions on the level of the sign. Within this double "self portrait," the artist is pictured as both subject and object. The subtle gradation between reading the term "VALIE EXPORT" as both signifier and sign is significant because acts of reading (associated with the text, or signifier) and the operation of viewing (connected to signs) become synonymous.

EXPORT draws out a further distinction in the operations that are used to receive information in *Tapp und Tastkino* when she transforms the role of the audience from "viewers" to "users" in order to experience her film through touch rather than sight. The physical elements of the *Tapp und Tastkino* may have been formally crude in construction and the work's meaning may have been obscured by the mass spectacle that ensued each public display; however, *Tapp und Tastkino's* inner machinations presented a sophisticated operation by which the viewer must forgo the reliance on the visual for a sense of psychological orientation and instead must rely on a haptic or tactile approach to communicate. Within the framework of the *Tapp und Tastkino*, the body becomes a mode of two-way communication.

Taking the female body out of the static realm of objectification and pushing it into the "mobility of signifying interrelations" became EXPORT's working definition of Expanded Cinema; her proposed

medium was that of the *Tapp und Tastkino* (EXPORT 258). Her notion of Expanded Cinema focused on recuperating the role of the body within cinema as a means of communication and is what separates her projects from those of the more dominant American discourse on Expanded Cinema. The definitions and applications of the term have been largely determined by Gene Youngblood and his 1970 book *Expanded Cinema* quickly became the definitive guide tracing a technically determinist and humanist approach to experimental, multimedia developments in film and art production during the late 1960s. VALIE EXPORT's work is not included in this historical framework, nor does she appear in any of his coverage of European Expanded Cinema activities. Regardless, EXPORT's aims for challenging cinematic viewing conditions break from Youngblood's version because she endeavored to create a sign language that did not purport to be universally humanist but instead demanded that it be read as extremely political in both form and content.

By equating the passive act of visual consumption with more directly physical groping, EXPORT's mini-theater revealed the social structures occurring simultaneously within visual structures such as cinema and representation, which would later be deftly articulated in 1974 by Laura Mulvey's signal text, "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema." EXPORT's strategy was to make public the sociological patterns that are covert, invisible, ingrained and naturalized. However, rather than simply engaging in a blunt exercise of trying to recuperate or exonerate the female body, EXPORT's exercise here implicates female subjectivity in a more complex level of critique. The female body embedded within the framework of the *Tapp und Tastkino* exists within a constant dialectical exchange between body and culture—the body becomes part of a system of communication and is neither wholly complicit in the system nor immune to it.[10] The intent was to alter the political realities as well as the aesthetics of viewing women.

Notes

[1] This is a reference to the institutional embrace of Pop art practices during this period as exemplified by Andy Warhol. For Warhol, the art studio became a literal factory, and the artist adopted the role of senior management directing shifts of workers to execute ideas using techniques adapted from mass production such as silk-screening to produce works of art. During the 1960s, it was the art management vernacular itself (collection, language, storage, and distribution) that would come to define the dominant type of Conceptual Art produced during this period. Art

historian Alexander Alberro has characterized this generation—which includes Lawrence Weiner, Joseph Kosuth, and Douglas Huebler—as having "advanced degrees and middle-class aspirations and who seemed to parallel the developments of world business" (Alberro, *Conceptual Art,* 2).

[2] The exhibition *VALIE EXPORT: Ob/De+Con(Struction)* organized by Moore College of Design in Philadelphia (18 January -27 February 2000) was the first solo exhibition of her work in the USA. EXPORT's multimedia installations were shown alongside more widely circulated projects involving video footage of performances. The only other venue in the USA was at the Santa Monica Museum of Art (9 March - 6 May 2001).

[3] Within US art history, figures such as Allan Kaprow and George Maciunas have largely come to define Happenings and Fluxus. However, EXPORT's films and writings convey a more complex roster of neo–avant-garde influences including Guy Debord, COBRA, Dick Higgins, and Yves Klein. She was also highly aware of the work of German artists such as Wolf Vostell, Josef Beuys, and Thomas Schmitt as well as an international array of contemporary feminist artists such as Carolee Schneemann, Yoko Ono, Gina Pane, Charlotte Moorman, and Marina Abramovic. For more details see descriptions of the documentaries that EXPORT made on these subjects in Mueller 206–7.

[4] In EXPORT's description of the project she wrote that "Tapp und Tastkino ist ein Beispiel für die Aktivierung des Publikums durch neue Interpretation" (EXPORT 258).

[5] The title *Tapp und Tastkino* is usually translated simply as "touch cinema," which loses the implication of the word *Tapp*, which connotes the sense of a clumsier act, that of looking or groping for something unknown.

[6] Brief descriptions of the Generali Foundation's archives are accessible via the web at http://www.gfound.or.at. A reconstruction of the first rendition of *Tapp und Tastkino* was fabricated in 1999 by the Foundation to be included in the exhibition *VALIE EXPORT: Ob/De+Con(Struction).*

[7] This is my translation of Lamb-Faffelberger's account.

[8] Alberro, "VALIE EXPORT," 136. In his exhibition review of *VALIE EXPORT Ob/De+Con(Struction)*, Alberro describes *Tapp und Tastkino* only in terms of the Vienna event and does not mention any others. His is a typical case in which the piece is never really looked at historically or over a period of time as a larger body of work under one title. He describes Weibel as an "accomplice who acted as her 'pimp'."

[9] EXPORT, 258. This is my translation of the terms that she uses to describe the dynamics of the project.

[10] Quotes and terms used by VALIE EXPORT were taken from a public lecture the artist gave about her Expanded Cinema projects at the Museum of Modern Art, New York on 25 January 1999.

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Raum-Ästhetik

Vassiliea Stylianidou

Ein Schwerpunkt meiner Arbeit in den letzten Jahren ist die Realisation von Installationen mit Videoarbeiten und Fotografien. Die Installationen kommunizieren stets stark mit den architektonischen Gegebenheiten des Ausstellungsortes. Die Auseinandersetzung mit den der Arbeit zugrunde liegenden thematischen Zusammenhängen führt häufig zur Realisierung von Projekten, die aufeinander folgen und das Thema unterschiedlich aufgreifen. Die Konzepte entwickle ich anhand von Zeichnungen, Photographien, Texten, Computeranimationen und Videos.

Einige der thematischen Zusammenhänge meiner Arbeit sind: Tisch - Stuhl (Untersuchung des Raumes anhand dieser zwei elementaren Raumbestandteile); Büros (Erforschung des Arbeitsrhythmus und der Bewegung der Grossraumbüros); Stadt (Untersuchung und Befragung des Konzeptes der zeitgenössischen Großstadt und des Lebens ihrer Bewohner); Animation-Fiktion-Vision-Realität: Entwerfen einer neuen fiktiven Vision für das städtische Leben. Im Folgenden werde ich einige Projekte der letzten zwei Jahre vorstellen.

IN[FRAME] 01, 2000.

Kunstraum, Düsseldorf, halle_für_kunst, Lüneburg und Badischer Kunstverein, Karlsruhe. Video-Installation mit drei Videoprojektionen.

Die Arbeit IN[FRAME] 01 untersucht den Arbeitsraum, die Arbeitsdauer und die Tätigkeit des Arbeitens an sich. In einem Großraumbüro einer Fernsehredaktion habe ich einen Arbeitstag mit einer Videokamera aufgenommen. In dem gewählten Raum habe ich drei unterschiedliche Kamerapositionen ausgesucht. Die Kamera war in den jeweiligen Positionen auf Stativ gestellt und wurde nicht bewegt. Innerhalb des jeweils unbewegten Kamerabildes (Frame) sind für die Bewegungen der Angestellten im Raum sichtbar (Bewegung innerhalb des unbewegten Rahmens der Bilder). Auf einer ersten Ebene wurde nur die Tätigkeit des Arbeitens als ein Bewegungsfluss im Raum aufgenommen. Jegliche zusätzliche Einmischung von meiner Seite, bis auf die Kamerapositionierung, wurde von meinem Konzept ausgeschlossen. Zusätzlich zu den Aufnahmen in dem von Menschen gefüllten Raum hatte

ich in einem leeren Konferenzraum gefilmt. Diesmal wurde die Kamera nicht auf Stativ gestellt. Das Kameraauge bewegte sich unterhalb des Tisches. Aus diesem Material sind drei Videos entstanden, die drei unterschiedliche Raum- und Bewegungsrhythmen aufweisen. Das eine Video besteht nur aus Standbildern. Jedes Bild dauert eine Sekunde. So ist die Ausweitung und Verdichtung im Baum sichtbar. Das zweite Video konzentriert sich schlicht auf kurze Bewegungsausschnitte aus dem Tag. Das dritte Video verwendet die Aufnahmen aus dem leeren Konferenzraum. Diese Arbeit wurde im Kunstbunker Nürnberg, im Kunstraum Düsseldorf in der halle_für_kunst e.V. in Lüneburg und in art-forum-berlin in Rahmen der Ausstellung „unterwegs" im Herbst 2000 und im Badischen Kunstverein in Karlsruhe bei der Ausstellung „Intime Expeditionen" 2001 gezeigt. Die Präsentationsform der Arbeit war eine Videoinstallation mit drei Videoprojektionen und einem Text, der auf die obersten Blätter einer Notizblöckeformation geschrieben war. Der Text lautet:

> Wir haben einen Raum, mehrere Oberflächen, endliche Kombinationen von Zwischenräumen eine Tätigkeit und ihre Dauer gesucht. Wir verteilen die Perspektiven, die Veränderung der Lichttemperatur, wir zeichnen die Tätigkeit und ihre Dauer auf; wir zergliedern den Raum; wir lösen die Bewegung von ihrer linearen Dauer ab.

Die Installation wurde an den drei unterschiedlichen Orten anhand der räumlichen Gegebenheiten unterschiedlich zusammengesetzt.

IN[FRAME] 02, 2001.

Aus den drei Videos der Arbeit IN[FRAME] 01 habe ich eine weitere Videoarbeit entwickelt. Das Material des Videos mit den kurzen Bewegungsabläufen wurde erneut in ein digitales Videobearbeitungsprogramm importiert. Aus jedem einzelnen Bild wurden mit Hilfe von digitalen Bildbearbeitungsverfahren alle Gegenstände und der Raum entfernt. Die Angestellten setzen diesmal ihre Bewegungen in einem gegenstandslosen Nicht-Raum fort.

Der Körper bleibt vorhanden und mit ihm seine Bewegung, mit dem Unterschied, dass er diesmal genau an der Stelle verschwindet, wo er anfangs in Berührung mit dem Gegenstand gekommen war. Der Gegenstand verschwindet und der Platzhalter des nun nicht vorhandenen Raumes, nämlich ein undefinierbarer Hintergrund, verwandelt sich in eine

weiche Oberfläche, so wie er teilweise oder ganz den bewegten Körper sinnlos und beliebig - aus der Sichtweise des Betrachters - verschluckt. Diese Arbeit ist noch im Prozess.

In den letzten dritten Abschnitten meines NaFöG-Stipendiums habe ich wie geplant eine dreimonatige Reise nach New York City und Orlando realisiert. In NYC habe ich die urbane Struktur des Arbeitens in reinen Bürogebäudevierteln wie dem Financial District und Midtown als Untersuchungsfeld in den Mittelpunkt meiner Video- und Fotografieaufnahmen gerückt. Objekt meiner Untersuchung war die Formalität der Zeichen / der Symbole des „Büroarbeitens", die sich einerseits in der Art der Bekleidung der Angestellten und anderseits in dem Mobiliar des Büros manifestieren.

IN[FRAME] 03, 2001.

Video-Installation mit acht Monitoren. Haus am Waidsee, Berlin und Kunst und Medienzentrum Adlershof, Berlin-Treptow.

Der Raum enthält nur die nötigsten Elemente, die ihn als einen Büroraum erkennen lassen. Das heißt, der Raum ist nur zu einem Zeichen umgewandelt, er berichtet schlicht über seine Formalität und Funktionalität. Ein Angestellter, dessen Bekleidungsart der Formalität des Raumes entspricht, sitzt am Rand des großen Schreibtisches. Je mehr der Bildausschnitt den Schreibtisch zeigt, umso mehr sieht man, dass er leer ist. Die Kamera ist auf dem Boden in einem Winkel von ca. 30 Grad positioniert und hat einen Abstand von ca. drei Meter zum Angestellten. Aus dieser Perspektive beginnt sie zu filmen und schwenkt langsam auf der horizontalen Ebene von der einen Ecke des Raumes bis zur anderen. Sie beschreibt einen Halbkreis. Der Angestellte erscheint nach ca. einer halben Minute im Bild. Die Schwenkung dauert etwas mehr als eine Minute. Die Kamera wird vertikal auf dem Stativ um ca. 45 cm nach oben verschoben und beschreibt den gleichen Halbkreis von der einen Ecke des Raumes bis zur gegenüberliegenden. Die Verschiebung auf der vertikalen Ebene wiederholt sich insgesamt viermal. Stets wird vom Raum und Angestellten nur ein Fragment aufgenommen. Niemals ist der gesamte Raum oder Körper zu sehen. Die Verschiebung des Blickes nach oben endet unterhalb des Gesichts des Angestellten. Die gleichen Aufnahmen habe ich in einem Zimmer der privaten Wohnung des gleichen Angestellten realisiert, Insgesamt sind acht Videofilme entstanden, vier im Büro und vier in der Wohnung. Jedes Video zeigt die einzelnen Ebenen des gleichen Kameraschwenks und eines jeweils nach oben verschobenen parallelen

fragmentierten Blicks auf den Raum und die Person. Sie sind so geschnitten, dass der Kameraschwenk bei jeder der vier unterschiedlichen Ebene der Verfilmung nur in einzelnen Standbildern wahrgenommen wird. Jedes Standbild dauert eine halbe Sekunde.

Die Videos werden als Rauminstallation auf zwei nebeneinander aufgehängten Monitorkolonnen gezeigt. Zwischen den beiden Kolonnen gibt es einen Abstand von ca. zwei Metern. Die vier zusammengehörenden Videos, welche die eine Kolonne bilden, und die potenziell Raum und Person als Einheit wiedergeben könnten, sind so synchronisiert, dass bei jedem Video Raum- und Körper- Fragmente asynchron im Bild und nie zusammengehörend auftauchen. Die Videoinstallation IN[FRAME] 03 ist im Rahmen der Ausstellung „Intime Expeditionen" im Haus am Waldsee in Berlin vom 2408.01 bis 7.10.01 gezeigt worden.

„do you want to kill me, baby?", 2002

KUNST-WERKE, Institute of Contemporary Art, Berlin und Gallery Kappatos, Athen, GR. Video-Installation mit drei Monitoren, Soundtrack. Das Projekt „do you want to kill me, baby" ist die Präsentation einer fiktiven Stadt, in der absolute Sicherheit herrscht. Das Video ist animiert.

Die „Stadt <A>"

Aufgrund einer eskalierten Unsicherheit im öffentlichen Raum hat sich der multinationale Konzern „MIT GmbH" entschieden, eine neue Stadt bauen zu lassen, die ihren Bewohnern das Privileg der absoluten Sicherheit gibt. Die Stadt wird in physischem Abstand zu allen anderen existierenden Städten in einer Wüste gebaut. Sie trägt den Namen „Stadt <A>." Die Gesetze des städtischen Zusammenlebens wurden in ihr neu bestimmt. Das Unternehmen „MIT GmbH" hat rund um die Welt mit einer Mehrzahl von kleineren Unternehmen fusioniert und erlangte dadurch das Monopol in einem großen Bereich der Produktion und Dienstleistung. Das Gebiet, auf dem die „Stadt <A>" gebaut ist, wurde von dem Unternehmen gekauft und gilt als unabhängiges Territorium, das sich in der Macht des Konzerns befindet und unter seiner Verwaltung steht. Keine traditionelle Regierung und keine traditionelle staatliche Gewalt können Ansprüche auf das Territorium und auf die „Stadt <A>" erheben. (Alles, was heute als bekannte Welt existiert ist weiterhin vorhanden). Die „Stadt <A>" besteht aus zwei Einheiten, die physisch

unabhängig voneinander existieren. Diese Einheiten sind: „Stadt <A>1": Wissensarchiv, „Stadt <A>2": Ausbildungsbereich.

Die „Stadt <A>1"

Der Konzern hat das Entscheidungsmonopol in der „Stadt <A>1." Er ist aber keine Regierung im herkömmlichen Sinne. Die Bewohner der „Stadt <A>1" sind keine Bürger, sondern Mitarbeiter des Konzerns. Es gibt keine Politik. Die Organisation der „Stadt <A>1" basiert auf Dezentralisierung. Alle Mitarbeiter der „Stadt <A>1" sind Wissenschaftler, die auf das Archivieren und Neuorganisieren des Wissens spezialisiert sind. Ihr Arbeitsieben ist das Leben des Büros.

Gesetze

Das Leben und Zusammenleben und -arbeiten der Bewohner in der „Stadt <A> 1" funktioniert nach dem Konsensprinzip. Die freiwillige Übereinstimmung ist die Voraussetzung für die Existenz der „Stadt <A>1." Die Mitarbeiter schließen mit dem Konzern einen Vertrag, bevor sie in die „Stadt <A>1" aufgenommen werden. Der Vertrag ist ohne Kündigungsfrist jederzeit kündbar. Wenn der Mitarbeiter sich entscheidet, den Vertrag zu kündigen, kann er die „Stadt <A>1" sofort verlassen und hat keine weiteren Verpflichtungen. Gewaltausübung und Kontrollmechanismen sind in der „Stadt <A>1" unsichtbar. Das Prinzip der „Stadt <A>1" ist Einfachheit mit Hilfe der Technologie, Reduktion der Gefühle und der Vielfalt, die in den traditionellen Städten verbreitet sind. Alles, was es geben soll, ist von den Grundgesetzen des Konzerns bestimmt, und alles, was nicht geregelt ist, gibt es nicht und kann daher auch nicht auftreten. Es gibt keine Hierarchien zwischen den Mitarbeitern. Alle haben den gleichen Lebensstandard und Arbeitsstatus. Es gibt kein Geldtauschsystem. Die Produkte, die wichtig für das Leben der Mitarbeiter sind, werden vom Gründungskonzern in den traditionellen Städten produziert und in die „Stadt <A>" importiert und verteilt. Die Mitarbeiter haben absolut keinen Anspruch auf persönlichen Besitz. Die Prinzipien der Modellstadt <A>1 werden durch die Architektur und Stadtplanung gespiegelt, geschützt und überhaupt erst ermöglicht. Durch die Architektur und Stadtplanung soll Besitzansprüchen sowie anderen Gefühlen, die Konflikte hervorrufen könnten, kein Platz gegeben werden.

Stadtplanung

Die „Stadt <A>1" besteht aus Terminals, Modulen und Tubes. Sie erstreckt sich in der Horizontalen. Die Mitarbeiter leben und arbeiten in Modulen. Es gibt folgende Modularten: Büromodul, Schlafmodul, Küchenmodul, Kinomodul und Sportmodul. Die Module sind für eine

Person geplant. Die Mitarbeiter besitzen kein Modul und sie wechseln die Arbeits- und Wohnmodule nach Bedarf .(Sie hinterlassen keine privaten Gegenstande, wenn sie die Module verlassen.) Die Module sind gleichzeitig Automobile und das einzige Verkehrsmittel der Stadt. Ein Modul kann sich nach Bedarf an andere Module andocken. So kann sich der Mitarbeiter von einem Modul zum anderen bewegen. Die freie Bewegung außerhalb der Module ist nicht möglich. Terminals sind große getrennte Flachen, auf denen sich die Module aufhalten oder sich an andere Module andocken können. Die Terminals sind durch die Tubes miteinander verbunden. Tubes sind schmale durchsichtige Kanäle, die als Wege der Fortbewegung dienen. Jeder Mitarbeiter ist in ein Netzwerk mit audiovisuellen Quellen eingeschlossen, so dass die Kommunikations- und Informationsaustauschmöglichkeit zwischen den Mitarbeitern nie unterbrochen wird. Die <Stadt <A>1>> befindet sich unter einer Glocke, die aus einem angriffsicheren Material besteht. Die Transparenz der Glocke ist aus Sicherheitsgründen beliebig von 100% auf 0% manipulierbar. Mittels einer Allround-Klima-Anlage wird ein angenehmes ausgewogenes Klima geschaffen.

Zwischenmenschliche Beziehungen / Kinder / Titel des Mitarbeiters

Es gibt keine Familie und keine Ehe. Es gibt keine Regelungen für private zwischenmenschliche Beziehungen. Die Mitarbeiter sind für das Gesetz privat beziehungslos. Durch Architektur und Stadtplanung werden dauerhafte zwischenmenschliche Beziehungen nicht gefordert. Kinder werden nur von der Berufsgruppe „Eltern" erzeugt und aufgezogen. Die Kinderproduktion ist sehr streng kontrolliert. Alle Mitarbeiter, die nicht zu der Berufsgruppe „Eltern" gehören, sind sterilisiert worden.

Kunst

In der „Stadt <A>1" wird nur eine sehr genau vorgesehene Kunstform kultiviert und für alle Mitarbeiter zur Verfügung gestellt. Die einzige Kunstform, die produziert wird, ist die audiovisuelle Abstraktion. In der „Stadt <A> 1" gibt es die Berufsgruppe „Künstler'. Diese Mitarbeiter sind Physiker, Architekten, Informatiker und Psychologen, die Programme für minimalistische audiovisuelle Sinfonien entwickeln, die in den Kunstmodulen aufgeführt werden. Kunstmodule sind zylindrische Container, derer Innen- und Außenwände riesige Projektionsflächen sind. Die Kunst in der „Stadt <A>1" ist nicht narrativ. Sie entwickelt keine Erzählungen und gemeinsame Mythen. Die Kunstformen der „Stadt <A>1" verwenden keine Sprache.

Der Lampenschirmverkäufer

Allan Woodman

Ein ganz normaler Tag. Die Tür war offen. Es war Sommer. Der Fernseher lief.

Ein weißhaariger Mann in einem schwarzen, zerschlissenen Frack kam an die Tür. Er verkaufte Lampenschirme. Er war ein würdevoller Mann, doch entstellt durch den Verlust seiner Hände. Er griff einen Schirm mit einer seiner Metallklauen.

"Wie wär's mit 'nem neuen Lampenschirm?"

Ich mochte den Schirm nicht. Ich hatte auch noch nie viele Gedanken an die Lampenschirme verschwendet, die ich schon hatte. Ich fragte mich, wie er seine Hände verloren hatte und versuchte ein Gespräch anzufangen.

"Gestern hat ein Mann an der Tür geklopft, der Schrubber und Besen verkaufte. Kennen Sie den?"

Er legte den Lampenschirm zurück auf seinen Handkarren.

"Hab' ich nichts mit zu tun. Ich verkaufe Schirme. Woll'n Sie einen?"

Ich hatte schon immer was übrig für menschliche Umtriebe, die kurz vorm Aussterben waren. Ich fragte ihn, wie lange er schon mit Lampenschirmen handelte.

"Vor fünfzehn Jahren hatte ich 'nen Stand auf jedem großen Jahrmarkt, 'nen Flohzirkus. Aber Zeitgeschmack und Hygiene haben uns mächtig zugesetzt."

"Ich hab' ein einziges Mal 'nen Flohzirkus gesehen, aber das glaubt mir keiner", sagte ich. "Ich erzähl' es schon gar keinem mehr. Aber ich könnte schwören, da gab es 'ne Flohhochzeit und 'nen Floh auf 'nem Fahrrad."

"Ich hatte als Bühne bloß 'nen kleinen Tisch, und nie mehr als 'ne Handvoll Stühle für's Publikum. Ich hatte 'ne Balletnummer, 'nen Drahtseilakt und ein Wagenzugrennen. Das Geheimnis ist, daß man Menschenflöhe nimmt. Bloß die haben die nötige Kraft, um mit den Hinterbeinen zu ziehen und zu schieben. Meine Flöhe waren unglaublich. Was 'ne Ausdauer! Die konnten jeden Tag hunderte von Vorstellungen geben und das für Wochen. Und nach der Vorstellung rollte ich dann meinen Ärmel hoch und lud meine Artisten zum Festschmaus ein."

Der Mann reckte seine Chromhaken in die Höhe.

"Ich hab' gelesen, daß in Mexiko die Kirche Flohkunst unterstützt", sagte ich.

"Nonnen haben Miniaturmodelle des Leidenswegs aus toten Flöhen und Stoffresten gebastelt und verkauft. Weil sie die Flöhe hatten, mußten sie keine Menschen schnitzen."

"Ich hatte 'nen Floh", sagte er leise "der war mein Lieblingstier. Er war der einzige, der von meiner Handfläche saugen durfte. Ich hab' ihn an eine goldene Kette gelegt, nicht länger als ein Finger. An der Kette hab' ich 'ne genau passende Kutsche festgemacht und die hat der Floh dann gezogen."

Ich dachte, ich hätte alles gesehen. Aber wie er über diesen Lieblingsfloh und die passende Kutsche sprach, gab mir zu denken. "Ja", sagte ich, und dann, lauter, "glauben Sie, Sie könnten mir das nochmal erzählen?"

Er starrte mich an. "Nein", sagte er zögerlich, "die Erinnerung macht mir zu schaffen."

Ich suchte nach einer passenden Antwort. "Ich verstehe", sagte ich schließlich.

Der Mann strich sich mit einer seiner Metallklauen übers Kinn.

"Moment mal", sagte er. "Geben Sie mir was zu schreiben."

Er holte einen der unbedruckten weißen Lampenschirme vor. Ich drückte einen Stift in seine linke Klaue. Es war ein Filzstift, den ich vergessen hatte, dem Kassierer zurückzugeben, als ich bei A+P einen Scheck schrieb.

Er malte den ganzen Flohzirkus auf den Schirm, die Hochzeit, den Seiltänzer und das Flohballett. Er zeichnete Szenen, von denen nicht mal die Rede gewesen war.

Schließlich zeichnete er den Floh, von dem ich wußte, das es der an der goldenen Kette sein mußte, denn er saß auf einer Handfläche. Die Hand war perfekt.

Ein paar Mal habe ich versucht, meinen Bekannten zu erklären, warum ich den Lampenschirm gekauft habe. Nach einer Weile stellte ich die Lampe neben mein Bett und machte die Schlafzimmertür zu.

This translation was done by Teut Deese, Christina J. Wegel, Kryztof Urban, and Wolfgang Nehring, and edited by Teut Deese. All are members of the UCLA Department of Germanic Languages.

This is a translation of Allan Woodman. "The Lampshade Vendor." *Flash Fiction: 72 very short Stories.* Ed. James Thomas, Denise Thomas, and Tom Hazuka. New York, London: W. W. Norton, 1992. 31-33.

Avital Ronell. *Stupidity*. Urbana and Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002

Reviewed by Victor Fusilero

In a time where both sides of the political spectrum continually accuse the other of dumbing down social debate, it is perhaps fitting that someone undertake an investigation of the use of epithets such as *dumb*, *idiot, moron,* and *imbecile*—in short, an investigation into the instrumentalization of the very question of stupidity. Successful in this aim is Avital Ronell, professor of German, English, and comparative literature, the chair of the German department at New York University, and the author of *The Telephone Book, Dictations,* and *Crack Wars.*

Taking her cue from Gilles Deleuze, who calls for a "thinking of stupidity" and an examination of its transcendental principles (32), Ronell moves away from the German tradition of knowledge as grounded in the Enlightenment to explore the other German philosophical tradition initiated by Friedrich Schlegel, which espoused unintelligibility and non-understanding. Friedrich Nietzsche would later extol stupidity for "promoting life and growth," although still careful to identify the "tyranny and discipline of stupidity" within slavery, Christianity, and education (3). Stupidity, then, is the source of many contradictions: not only has stupidity functioned to name racist, sexist, and proto-Fascist impulses, but it has also served to name the objects of these same impulses as "stupid" (27). Given that the task to identify stupidity has often fallen to the intellectual, stupidity—in order to escape this identification—has often masked itself as truth or absolute knowledge, especially in narcissistic systems that claim closure and posit their own self-grounding. Stupidity, however, has also stood on the side of blind faith, religious fervor, and optimism—forms of "ontological idiocy" that, in the face of an unknowable and unfigurable deity, accept the limits of knowledge (47). Intelligibility, grounded as it were in a metaphysics of presence that allows for the iterability of interpretation, the erasure of the nonrepresentable, and the establishment of science, was complicit in the forgetting of stupidity (49). In play here is a rhetoric of spectacle and deception that is called forth by stupidity in order to mask itself, namely the "irruption of the real" (50). To smooth over the "destructive moment of noninterpretation," "stupidity recedes behind the scenes as the illusion of its other comes to the fore" (50).

Reading Jean-Jacques Rousseau, Ronell locates stupidity on the side of immediacy, which can only be grasped mediately and which calls for the impromptu production of meaning (48). Unable to withdraw from a present situation in order to reflect upon it, Rousseau judges himself stupid because of his inability to be present to his own presence. This is the origin of the "stupid utterance," which responds to the violence of the "social obligation to speak presently" (51). Reading Karl Marx, Ronell identifies the capitalist state as a "pusher of stupidity," an opiate which slavishly ties the worker to the means of production. As a result, alienated labor produces cretinism for and on the body of the worker (57-58). Finally, in examining the Intelligence Quotient system, Ronell shows how it relates survival to aptitude and how it introduces a systematic terminology that produces an intelligent native citizenry over and against a stupid immigrant other.

The brilliance of Ronell's study continues in her analysis of stupidity (*bêtise*) and its corporal (*bête*) aspect: "It is that which shows itself to man but is forgotten with man, when he turns his gaze away" (53). Ronell presents Robert Musil's claim that stupidity becomes a draw to violence, both socio-political and rhetorical, and how epithets such as "mean and stupid," "vain and stupid," and "fat and stupid," which often appear as linguistic pairs, figure a domestic violence that is inscribed on the body (85). In Dostoevsky's *The Idiot*, Prince Myshkin figures the "sheer facticity of bodily existence" (179). Like the tortured and crucified Christ, the Prince is marked by a tormented and ill body: "Idiocy has something to do with the nearly existential fact of being stuck with a body or, to put it differently, with the fact that the body has claims upon us" (180).

In her reading of Paul de Man, Ronell claims that the coupling of stupidity and illness—the breakdown of the body—is mirrored in the breakdown of language itself. Its formal and mechanical grammar—the linguistic *effet machinal*—aims for fluidity and continuity only to be broken down by the materiality of language itself, which disrupts and interferes in this process of signification. Here, de Man re-inscribes Martin Heidegger's notion of technology, which discloses its essence in the singular moments of breakdown (98). Language does not merely cast about for the right referent; rather, it posits a right referent in order to fall short of it (99). This "will to be tested"—a linguistic "test drive"—is marked by a failure which must be continually re-inscribed into language's ongoing dialectic. Consequently, language necessarily calls for "interpretive and diagnostic strategies" that produce an "excess of discourse" in order to construct knowledge around a sick body (186). As Jean-Luc Nancy writes:

> This non-knowledge is not negative knowledge or the negation of knowledge; it is simply the absence of knowledge or the negation of knowledge; it is simply the absence of knowledge, the absence of the very relation of knowledge, whatever its content. (186)

The symptomizing body presents itself as uninscribable; instead, it "exscribes everything, starting with itself" (186). In similar fashion, stupidity is that which exscribes everything: "Stupidity exposes while intelligence hides" (10).

Stupidity, however, is not the mere other of knowledge or understanding. As Ronell claims at the beginning of her book,

> Stupidity does not allow itself to be opposed to knowledge in any simple way, nor is it the other of thought. It does not stand in the way of wisdom, for the disguise of the wise is to avow unknowing. At this time I can say only that the question of stupidity is not satisfied with the discovery of the negative limit of knowledge; it consists, rather, in the absence of a relation to knowing. (5)

Stupidity, ever recalcitrant, cannot be reduced to a mere relation: "If stupidity were that simple—if stupidity were that stupid—it would not have traded depths for the pits and acted as such a terror for Roland Barthes or Robert Musil or preschoolers" (10). Ronell's text is marked by a postfoundationalism that resists reterritorializing that which she is deterritorializing. Unwilling to call stupidity anything, Ronell does call for an openness to stupidity akin to Friedrich Hölderlin's *Dichtermut* (the poet's courage), which embraces *Blödigkeit* (stupefaction, stupidity). Hölderlin's "poetic courage consists in embracing the terrible lassitude of mind's enfeeblement, the ability to endure the near facticity of feeblemindedness": The poetic utterance begins with the stammer (6). An intimidation of the poet, *Blödigkeit* releases and opens the poet, who then is able to give in to sheer relatedness and pure exposure. The image of the idiotic poet (Hölderlin, Wordsworth) or the ridiculous philosopher (Kant) recapitulates two topoi in Ronell's previous book, *Finitude's Score: Essays for the End of the Millenium* (Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska Press, 1994), where indeterminacy and finitude mark the inability to appropriate meaning:

> Finitude, in its 'essence', stems from the inappropriated nature of meaning. There is always something that slips by, an excess that cannot be accounted for, and it is only where, historically, finitude has been *infinitized* that endless damage has been done: the frightful hubris of metaphysical man....Hopefully finitude, as opening and breakthrough, offers the way to bring to term something surprising, new, resilient. [. . .] What should be clearly brought out is the fact of finitude's *excessive* nature, not only because of the inappropriability of its meaning [...] but, as the experience of sheer exposition, because of the way it refuses to disclose itself fully. (5)

Similarly, stupidity refuses to disclose itself fully. Its muteness, which is figured in the poetic stammer or rhetorical caesura, points to the shadow that seemingly blocks the light of understanding. One might recall that Wordsworth considered the sun the symbol of knowledge—"the mind with absolute sovereignty upon itself" that shines undisturbed in all its brilliance (276). Stupidity, however, is not the lunar other to this Enlightenment metaphor. Adorning the pages of Ronell's text is the image of the sun in partial or full eclipse, which throughout history struck its viewers senseless, astounding and amazing them. This perhaps is the figure of stupidity and of *stupere*, "to astonish, to bring to a stand-still, to stop": by seemingly blocking, it exposes. Lest we forget: Aristotle taught that wonder—stupor—is the beginning of philosophy.

Sanford Kwinter. *Architectures of Time. Toward a Theory of the Event in Modernist Culture.* Cambridge, MA & London: MIT Press, 2002

Reviewed by Jens Priwitzer

What should a book that is exploring a discursive phenomenon look like? Certainly something like Sanford Kwinter's *Architectures of Time*. The basic framework for his project is centered around two important concepts: field and event. What Kwinter wants to show the reader is that the modern age relativizes the continuity of the temporal progress and introduced a new concept of time into science and art: singularity, far removed from any causality. Kwinter's attempt to trace the new concept of time at the beginning of the 20th century is wide-ranging and interdisciplinary. In six related essays starting with German physics (Albert Einstein), Kwinter researches the impact of the new understanding of time. His development of this concept through Italian sculpture (Umberto Boccioni) and architecture (Antonio Sant'Elia) leads into a discussion of French philosophy (Henri Bergson) and ultimately turns back to German literature (Franz Kafka).

In the first two chapters, "The Complex and the Singular" and "Modernist Space and the Fragment," Kwinter tries to set up the problem field of his research. How did our understanding of time in a classical physical way change? For Kwinter this is traceable to a new concept of "virtuality," which was introduced into physics at the beginning of the 20th century. The beginning was grounded in thermodynamics and expanded in the form of "energy" to mechanics and even capitalist theory. The totality became, according to Kwinter, more and more questionable, whereas the rise of the singular, the single event, can be seen as an oppositional process. However, this single event cannot be seen as static, but in perpetual transformation, in "fluidity." For Kwinter this impacts on the understanding of the world outside the sciences as well. Prefigured by late 19th-century philosophers and other thinkers, the modernists attempt to overcome metaphysics and the absolute. Historicity is involved in an eternal process of reorganization, redistribution, and revaluation. Even space and time are no longer thought of as absolute categories but are likewise relativized. Thinking of space and time is no longer purely subject-orientated nor purely object-orientated but rather a dynamic process based on "multiplicity, change, and hazard" (40). As Kwinter shows, the consequences for modern artworks were both the openness and a greater degree of a surpassing of previous fixed limits.

The next chapter "Physical Theory and Modernity: Einstein, Boccioni, Sant'Elia" is the crucial one, in which Kwinter fills his theoretical frame with an analysis of the impact made by the new understanding of time in science, philosophy, and aesthetics. The three names in the chapter title are related to specific concepts of thinking about this theory of time. For Einstein, this is the term "field," introduced in his *Special Theory of Relativity*. In this seminal work, he frees the "field," an antiquated concept in physics from any material substratum, where only functions, vectors, and speed govern. Crucial for Kwinter's argumentation is that only "fluidity" can describe the movement of the forces in the field. After this discussion, he turns to aesthetics and the sculptor Boccioni, who in his works also tries to overcome old aesthetic theories by resisting the separation of objects and environment by establishing a continuous field between them. Time and space are no longer the absolute *differend* to a work of art, but they "are full and have a plastic consistency" (67). The artwork becomes a multiplicity in which the whole field is virtually present in all forms and in which only the actual event is realized. Kwinter then proceeds to Sant'Elia and his concept of *la città nuova*. Not only the remaining sketches but the whole concept as well are fragmentary and mirrors the new concept of the event. Buildings and neighborhoods are atomized and follow a kinetic tension, where the movement of the inhabitants is no longer touched by absolute causality. Architecture becomes a system in which function and transparency are of increasing importance. Regarded from the standpoint of the whole, the system fixed to infrastructure is only "an extended field of movement and circulating forces" (83). For Kwinter, Sant'Elia breaks with the two-dimensional concepts of urban planing of the early 20th century in order to develop his new, three-dimensional model of spatial organization. The city is a heterogeneous conglomerate with circulating forces within which no fixed or centered meaning can exist any longer.

The next two chapters leave the theoretical discussion and look at the work of Franz Kafka, specifically *The Metamorphosis*. For Kwinter, metamorphosis is opposed to development and embedded in a "realm of the *intensive*" (110) that guarantees qualitative multiplicity. For Kwinter, Kafka's images are frozen and lead to an infinity of complications. The microscopic point-of-view in Kafka's narration emphasizes only the present and the actual, without paying attention to the totality. The concept of time becomes questionable when events are no longer related to each other but stand for themselves as single events. Kwinter examines this in a close reading of Kafka's text in which he locates this new understanding of the event character in the body of Gregor Samsa, in the food, in gestures, and in the whole setting of the narration as an undecidable state between

dreams and vigil. Unrealized fantasies of escaping the hierarchical political order and the family circle construct a field of relations (between things and characters) and forces (communications). Animality as the topic and end of the narration becomes a central focus of Kwinter's analysis because it inhabits pure form and constitutes a fluidity of concepts. The last portion of this reading is dedicated to Marcel Duchamp. Like Kafka, the artist endeavors to overcome the split between public and private. According to Kwinter's logic, the next important step is to create a desire for an object without fulfilling the semantics of the desire: It creates a field "where everything is connectable in manifold ways on the same plane and in a common dimension, namely, that of desire" (202). Returning to Kafka, Kwinter exploits our connection to the modern artists of the early 20th century. What we share with them is "the predicament of inhabiting a world, whose forces of coercion and evil have spun around us a web so tight and dense that its totality has passed well beyond measure" (209).

In his deconstructive reading of the modern discourse of space and time (obviously trained by Derridian vocabulary), Kwinter performs the thematics of his book through its form. We have six somewhat strongly related essays, emphasizing the fragment rather than the totality. But this is both to the benefit and detriment of the book. Kwinter has the ability to move the reader from one topic to the next, covering the different types of discourses for his analysis. For example, he convincingly links this analysis of Kafka with a study of Uexküll's theory of environment. In doing so, however, Kwinter sometimes loses track of his argument, for instance, when he moves immediately from Kafka to Duchamp and completely shifts his focus. Whereas his first, more theoretical part, is a strong and persuading analysis of space and time, Kwinter's literary analysis about Kafka lacks this force of conviction. The episodes in Kafka's narration only allow him to look for other similar discursive features in different fields. While he is adept at finding supporting concepts for his earlier analysis, he does not ultimately address their importance with regard to Kafka. The singularity of Kafka—the event of Franz Kafka himself—disappears behind the discursive discussion of singularity.

Contributors

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Vassiliea Stylianidou studied literature and linguistics at the University of Jannina, Greece from 1985 to 1989, and the plastic arts at the Hochschule der Künste in Berlin from 1993 to 1999. Her works, which consist mainly of multimedia installations (video and photography), focus on the exploration of space (vis-à-vis the relationship of table and chair), the rhythm of work and movement in offices, the relationship of the metropolis and its inhabitants, and the design of a new fictive vision for urban life. Her most recent exhibitions include the following: *Playcities* (2003, Gallery Kappatos, Athens); *AG* (2003, Schloss Plüschow Mecklenburgisches Künstlerhaus); *7th International Video Festival VideoMedeja* (2003, Novi Sad, Serbia); *Chiangmai First New Media Art Festival* (2003; CMU Art Museum, Thailand); *familistère 1* (2002, Kunstwerke Berlin, Institute of Contemporary Art); and many others.

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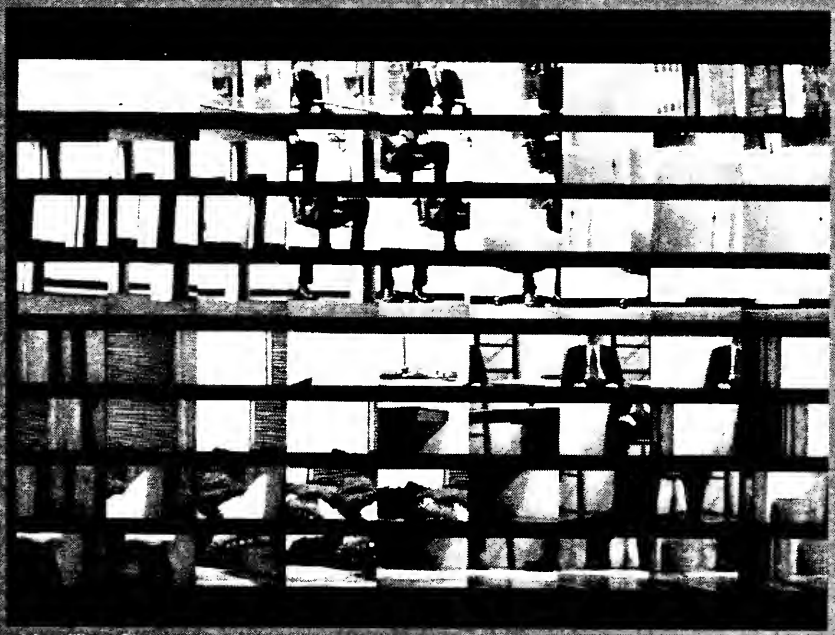

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